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**“Leydi’s World:  
A Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis  
Of the Cut-Flower Industry and Its Women Workers  
In Cayambe, Ecuador”**

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**“Leydi’s World:  
A Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis  
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In Cayambe, Ecuador”**

**by**

**Sophie Marita Fuchs**

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the people of Vicundo. They showed tremendous hospitality not only to me during my fieldwork in Summer 2017, but also to the UT Maymester group when we stayed with the community during the program. The people of Vicundo opened their doors to share their homes, their culture and tradition and their experiences with people from elsewhere, fostering international friendships. I commend the community for their desire to build these friendships with people from across the globe, and I wish them much success with their community tourism project as it develops.

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Image credits: The title page and first page of each chapter starts with photographs taken by the author of ceramic tiles created by the Ecuadorian artist Eduardo Vega in his studio in Cuenca, Ecuador. All other photos were taken by the author, unless otherwise noted.

## **Abstract**

# **Leydi's World: A Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis of the Cut-Flower Industry and Its Women Workers in Cayambe, Ecuador**

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This thesis explores the gendered, raced, classed and aged experiences of women working in the floriculture industry in Cayambe, Ecuador, questioning how the work affects and shapes female workers' daily lives and how they navigate and negotiate such work. The thesis relies on the method of multiple working hypotheses to hypothesize that flower work is either positive and empowering, negative and exploitative, or both positive and negative, representing both opportunity and exploitation. The project focuses on the case study of the community of Vicundo, outside Cayambe, where the majority of women work or have worked on nearby flower plantations. It takes a feminist geographic approach with a feminist commodity chain analysis (Ramamurthy, 2004) to provide more embodied narratives of these women's experiences to give voice to women who, in

many past studies, are simply statistics. The project's theoretical framework weaves together literature on gender, development and agriculture, feminist political economy of labor and feminist political ecology to add to the floriculture literature.

The thesis finds that women's experiences in the cut-flower industry are varied and nuanced, representing both positive, empowering aspects as well as negative, exploitative aspects. These experiences are raced, gendered, classed, and aged, very much shaped by hierarchies of power that echo the structures of colonial *haciendas*. In addition, one should not make the blanket statement that women working in flowers are 'empowered' through their work in the industry. Instead, they must actively navigate and negotiate it, making sacrifices, in order to create the best situation for themselves and their families. Flower workers are both producers *and* consumers, and the cut-flower industry is strongly affecting their lives and consumption in the region, with few alternatives. Finally, while advertising does acknowledge the labor of 'artisan' flower workers, more of an effort should be made to *recognize on an international level* who they are, what they do to produce flowers, and what effects the work has on their lives and the region. Throughout, women's narratives enrich understanding of the complexity of flower work.

In conclusion, although Ecuador is one of the top exporters of cut-flowers to the United States, most consumers in the Global North do not know where these flowers come from and the labor and resources that go into it. This project attempts to fill in that story, to visibilize the commodity chain and the majority female actors

within it to Global North consumers. With a better understanding of the commodity chain, particularly the experiences of women working in the industry in Ecuador, consumers can make more informed decisions about what they consume and to pressure for positive reform to improve labor conditions for the industry's workers.

**Keywords:** Women, gender, flowers, floriculture, labor, Andes, Ecuador, Cayambe, empowerment, exploitation, feminist commodity chain analysis.



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## CHAPTER 1: Planting Roses in the Rose Bed

*"[R]oses are naturally cultivated high in the Andes Mountains of Ecuador. We harness the power of nature to grow the finest roses. Known for its fertile soil and pristine waters of Cayambe's glaciers, the land has delivered bountiful harvests for centuries...Our passion lies in the understanding that we are playing a role in the events that create memories that will last a lifetime. We are selected as the rose for special moments in peoples' lives: a wedding, a celebration, a remembrance, a commemoration"*

- Text from Rosaprima flower company website

*"There was the debate, neatly framed and set before me. On one hand, work on the flower farms was low paying, exhausting, and hazardous. All this to produce a short-lived luxury product for Americans who demand even lower prices for a better and better flower. On the other hand, people need jobs...'If you buy Ecuadorian roses, you are allowing an Ecuadorian family to stay together'."*

- Stewart, Amy in *Flower Confidential* (153)

Today we live in an era in which more and more products are available for consumers year-round, products that have traveled thousands of miles to get to store shelves for purchase. This includes big, bright flowers in many shades of red, pink, purple, yellow and orange that are brought home to celebrate mothers on Mother's Day, loved ones on Valentine's Day, as well as birthdays, baby showers, weddings, funerals, religious events, and holidays. Such flowers represent love,

celebration, mourning, rites of passage, and wealth. They are most often associated with women and femininity, and they are generally fleeting, lasting up to two weeks if cut into bouquets before they die and are trashed. Because Ecuador is one of the top exporters of cut-flowers to the United States, exporting 71% of its cut-flowers to the US in 2007 (Stewart, 2007), and the world's third largest exporter overall (Conefrey, 2015), it is likely that the reader has purchased or enjoyed flower from Ecuador at some point. However, most consumers in the Global North do not know where these flowers come from and the labor and resources that go into that bouquet on the table. This project offers one account of that story, making visible the commodity chain and the actors within it to American and other consumers in the Global North. With a better understanding of the commodity chain, particularly the experiences of women working in the industry in Ecuador, consumers can make more informed decisions about what they consume. The project also seeks to justify the building of pressure for positive reform to improve labor conditions for the industry's workers, including better wages, better protection from chemical exposure and sexual harassment, and more standardization of benefits like health and childcare, issues discussed in the coming pages. I do not advocate for the banning of the flower industry in Ecuador, as my thesis will show that it provides an important source of income and opportunity; instead, my purpose is to compel readers and consumers alike to call for industry reform.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that frame this thesis project are the following:

- (1) What are the (gendered, raced, classed, and aged) experiences of women working in the floriculture industry in Cayambe, Ecuador?
- (2) How do female workers navigate and negotiate this work?
- (3) How does work in floriculture affect and shape these workers' daily lives?

While broad in scope, these questions are addressed in the following chapters through the case study of a community and the narratives of informants connected to the cut-flower industry in different ways. The concluding chapter revisits these questions individually, providing findings and conclusions.

## HYPOTHESES

This thesis relies on an approach of multiple working hypotheses (Chamberlin, 1965).<sup>1</sup> These hypotheses are the following: (1) Work in flower plantations is generally positive for women, representing an economic opportunity that empowers them to improve their lives. Women generally have similar experiences and treatment no matter what station in the flower plantation they work. (2) Work in flower plantations is generally negative for women, representing exploitative labor that does not improve their lives beyond the domestic sphere they previously inhabited. Women have different experiences and treatment depending

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<sup>1</sup> The next chapter will discuss this approach and its significance in more detail.



on their station in the plantation, as well as due to characteristics such as gender, age, class, and race. (3) Work in flower plantations is nuanced, both positive and negative for women, representing both opportunity and exploitation. Women's experiences vary greatly to reflect this nuance, depending on the previously mentioned characteristics. They must navigate work in the industry in order to make the best they can of their situation and daily lives outside the plantations. These hypotheses will be revisited in the concluding chapter.

#### **ECUADORIAN CONTEXT: AGRICULTURE AND NEOLIBERALISM**

Ecuador's Andean region contains a rich history and a landscape that is both physically and culturally diverse, with indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, and mestizo peoples sustaining their livelihoods through smallholder agriculture as well as commercial agriculture at different scales (Altieri, Funes-Monzote, & Petersen, 2012; Knapp, 1991; Netting, 1993; Zimmerer, Carney, & Vanek, 2015). Such livelihoods have been maintained for centuries, with Ecuadorians employing practices such as terracing, drainage and irrigation techniques, crop rotation, and polyculture, growing and eating staple crops such as corn (*maíz*), beans (*fréjol*), potatoes (*papas*), as well as wheat (*trigo*), barley (*cebada*) and sugar (*caña*) introduced during the Spanish conquest (Knapp, 1991). Andean farmers have promoted principles of agrobiodiversity and agroecology to maintain numerous varieties of crops, including

hundreds of varieties of potatoes, as well as to protect local soil and water resources (Altieri et al., 2012; Zimmerer et al., 2015).

Mountains, including the Andes, have been of interest to scholars, particularly geographers, for some time. Because living in mountains brings with it certain challenges, such as hazards like high altitudes, steep slopes and rock slides, mountains are often portrayed as doomed for human habitation (Knapp, personal communication). However, humans have remained in these landscapes, prompting scholars to study such resilient culture. In the case of Ecuador, scholars focused on livelihoods in the Andes have described the network of social capital that exists among community members in this context (Bebbington, 1997). Others have focused on the desire to organize life according to the principles of *buen vivir* or *sumak kawsay*, loosely translated as ‘the good life’ and included in language in 2008 Ecuadorian constitution (Gudynas, 2011; Zimmerer, 2012). These concepts come from the Andean cosmovision and represent a communitarian, spiritual and holistic way of life that include ideas of “reciprocity, solidarity and relationality” (Giunta, 2014, p. 1213). While they study this phenomenon in the Brazilian Amazon, Winklerprins and Souza (2005) describe how people create livelihoods in urban areas by maintaining connection with rural settings where they grow their own food, often migrating back and forth between these spaces. In addition, Andean rural livelihoods include examples of pluriactivity, in which people engage in multiple activities to sustain their livelihoods and to generate income (Brookfield & Parsons,

2007). Finally, the concept of 'sustainable rural livelihoods' takes into account the complex, plural economic and social activities and relations of such livelihoods in a way that broader development ideas cannot measure (Chambers & Conway, 1991).

Young (2008) has reviewed these long-inhabited landscapes with historic agricultural production and other types of land change, arguing that such landscapes are subject to elements of both stasis and flux, requiring a more complex examination of space. Building on Young's (2008) ideas, one recent characteristic of flux having a significant effect on the Andean landscapes is a change in rural population density. In the past century, as cities and urban areas have developed, an urban policy bias has meant that opportunities and resources, such as schools, housing, and jobs, have been concentrated in urban centers, with fewer resources available to people living in rural areas. For those Ecuadorians in the rural Andes, the result has been an inducement to migrate to urban areas or other countries in order to maintain their livelihoods, to provide for families and to survive (Bebbington, 2001; Jokisch, 2014; Jokisch & Pribilsky, 2002; Sawers, 2005; Young, 2008). Lack of available resources and resulting rural-to-urban migration has had a significant effect on the landscape, including land use patterns for agriculture, as well as 'remittance landscapes' in which Ecuadorians in other countries send money home to families to build or upgrade their homes (Jokisch, 2014). A transition to industrial, monocultural practices as prescribed by the Green Revolution, has resulted in a marginalization of traditional practices.

Ecuador itself is not new to export-oriented agriculture; it is known globally for its production and export of agricultural products such as bananas and cacao for chocolate, having produced these products for centuries (Sawers, 2005). In recent decades, however, Ecuador has turned to non-traditional<sup>2</sup> agricultural production for export, including broccoli (Partridge, 2016), artichokes and asparagus (Martínez Valle, 2013). These products each represent complex, transnational commodity chains with numerous participants, most of whom are disconnected from and generally not even aware of each other. Fischer and Benson (2006) have explored a similar phenomenon in their book *Broccoli & Desire*, tracing the commodity chain of broccoli from rural Guatemala to supermarkets in the United States. Much of the production side of this commodity chain is invisible to international consumers who do not know about the difficult and exploitative work, often carried out by indigenous peoples. The story of flowers, as we will see, shares similar parallels.

### **The Cut-Flower Industry in Ecuador**

Since the 1980's, another type of non-traditional agriculture for export has appeared on the scene in the Andes: floriculture (Gasselin, 2001; Knapp, 2015, 2017). As Friedemann-Sánchez (2006) describes, the cut-flower industry moved south from the United States to take advantage of lower-cost labor, starting in Colombia

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<sup>2</sup> Non-traditional products in this case refers to new or recently initiated production (Sawers 2005).

in the 1960's and expanding into Ecuador due to favorable trade agreements conducive to lower-cost export. The most common flowers produced in this industry are: Roses, carnations, pompons, chrysanthemums, alstroemerias, statice, gypsophilas, gerberas, and calla lilies, among many other varieties (Ibid). Typically for export to regions such as North America and Europe, cut-flower production represents high-value agricultural enterprise (Knapp, 2017). Ecuador has recently witnessed a massive boom in floriculture production, now representing a multi-million-dollar industry and a significant portion of agricultural GDP (Knapp, 2017).

The cut-flower industry in Ecuador is made up of private, medium-scale enterprises that are tucked in rural sections of the Andean mountains, with access to urban areas for transport and export to consumer countries (Ibid). Its location on the Equator, meaning regular sunlight year-round, a favorable growing climate of the Andean mountains, as well as access to markets and export via airport, makes Ecuador an ideal geographic location to produce flowers (Knapp, 2017; Bedford 2009). As a result, the industry has significantly changed the physical landscape of the Andes in terms of land and resource use. Views of the Andean landscape from above through technologies like Google Earth reveal significant and increasing coverage of the landscape over time with plastic-covered greenhouses. In general,

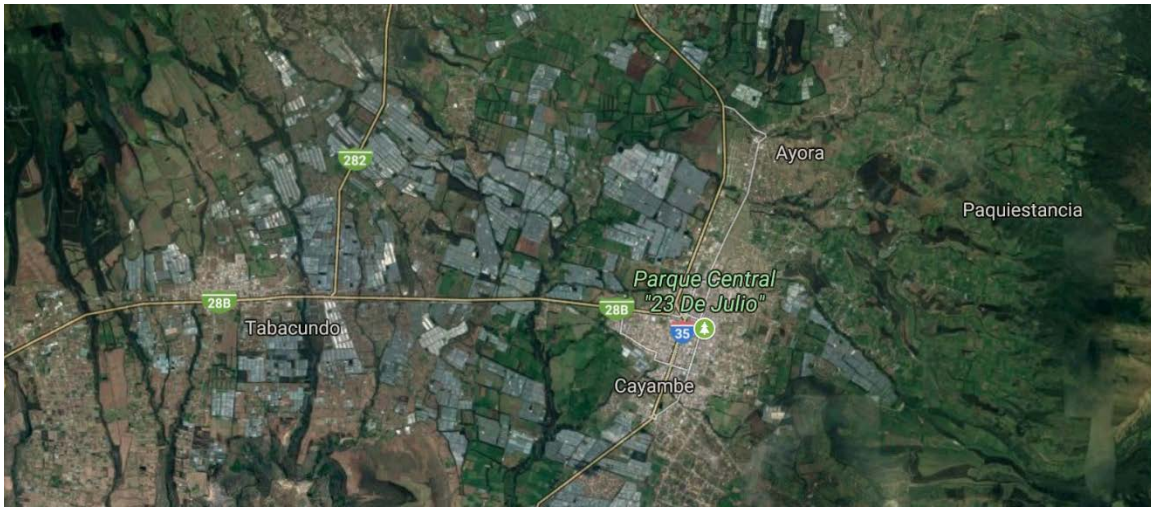


Figure 1. Google Maps showing mostly flower greenhouses around Cayambe and Tabacundo (gray areas dotting the landscape, screenshot July 4, 2017)

these greenhouse plantations are based on flatter, higher quality pieces of agricultural land, with small-scale agricultural production relegated to steeper-sloped, land that is less conducive to commercial agriculture (Sawers, 2005).

### **Review of Floriculture Literature**

Floriculture is labor-intensive and highly gendered work, with the majority of the workers in the industry young and female (Korovkin 2003; Friedemann-Sanchez 2006). Male workers typically work outside on the plantations maintaining the flower plants, while female workers typically work indoors in the processing centers, preparing flowers for shipping (Knapp 2016; Bedford 2009; Friedemann-Sanchez 2006). In the majority of cases in which flower plantations apply pesticides, male workers apply these chemical products, generally in rotating shifts followed by doctor's screenings and assignments away from exposure to the inputs; female



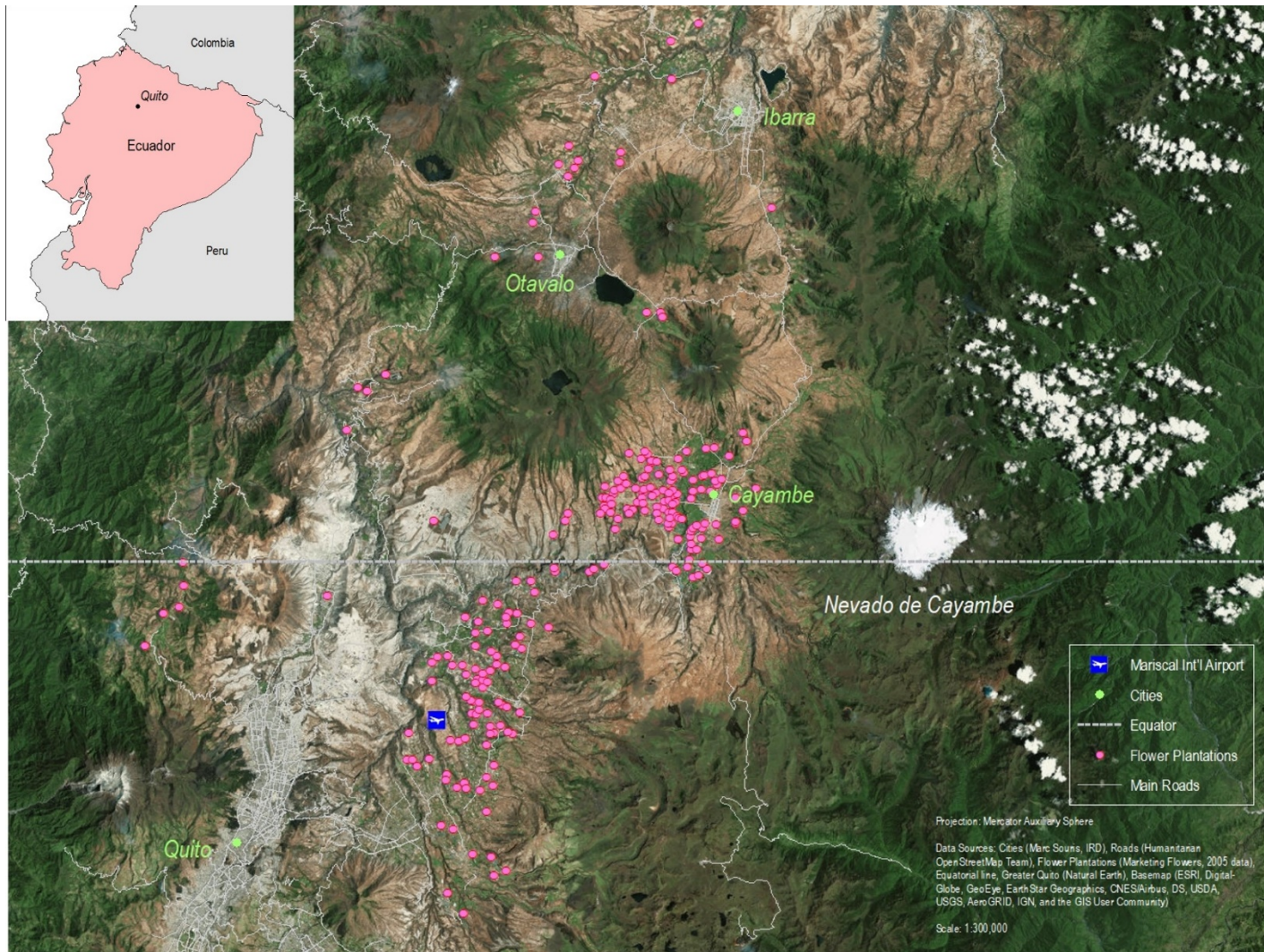


Figure 2. Map showing clusters of flower plantations around Cayambe, near Nevado de Cayambe volcano, the equatorial line, and Quito's Mariscal International Airport to export abroad. (Flower plantation data georeferenced and digitized from 2005 map by Marketing Flowers.)

workers generally are not assigned to such work and therefore have less exposure to chemicals, at least in theory. Friedemann-Sanchez (2006) has shown that gendered narratives and stereotypes shape the assignment of labor, such as men not being subject to pregnancy and being better equipped to face exposure to chemicals, as well as females having ‘nimble fingers’ that make them better equipped to prepare cut flowers for shipping, resulting in a highly gendered division of labor between men and women on the flower plantation, although these divisions are changing.

### ***Floriculture Opportunities***

Work on Ecuador’s flower plantations is nuanced and represents both opportunities and challenges. This section will review opportunities presented by the industry, while the following section will explore challenges. One significant opportunity is economic: the cut-flower industry is “the most important agro-industry in [the Andes north of Quito]” (Bedford, 2009) and the “fourth-largest export commodity”, with EXPOFLORES reporting 100,000 direct and indirect jobs in 2013 (Mena-Vásquez, Vincent, Vos, & Boelens, 2017). In 2013, ProEcuador reported the economic value of flowers exported from Ecuador at \$608 million, and in 2016, the United Nations ranked Ecuador as number three in terms of total cut-flower exports worldwide (Ibid).

For a country that relies on agricultural exports as a large part of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but simultaneously has always devoted few resources to



its agricultural sector, the cut-flower agro-export industry represents a significant agricultural endeavor and money-maker. As Bebbington (2001) describes: “If the market is the determining factor in the definition of rural policies, Andean agriculture has two possibilities: to disappear, or to modernize violently in order to achieve competitive levels of productivity and production” (414). These two distinct trajectories refer back to the urban bias described earlier, in which rural Andean communities face the challenge of creating their own opportunities with fewer resources. In Ecuador, the cut-flower industry may represent one such opportunity to both maintain profitable agriculture and to maintain rural livelihoods in the Andes, at the cost of arguably ‘violent’, rapid transition from traditional livelihoods.

Workers participating in the industry have employment that provides minimum wage or slightly more, in many cases meaning that they can maintain livelihoods without having to migrate to cities looking for jobs and income. Additionally, some local Ecuadorians have used larger-scale cut-flower plantations as models to develop their own small-scale enterprises (Ávalos Ahumada, 2017; Knapp, 2017; Rodriguez Castro, Pini, & Baker, 2016). Bedford (2009) describes how this industry is presented particularly as an opportunity for women (Newman, Larreamendy, & Maldonado, 2001), who make up the majority of the workforce: “employment in flowers is seen to empower<sup>3</sup> women through giving them access to

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of “empowerment” in this sense is problematic and will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

wages and through changing the behavior of men” (99). Female workers, who are typically the ones remaining in communities in the mountains as men migrate to urban areas for work, face limited options for employment, and thus they are able to sustain a living working in the cut-flower industry (Korovkin, 2003). Ostensibly, the work and wages may also change the power dynamics of traditional households in which men are the typical income-earners, although Bedford (2009) challenges the extent to which these dynamics actually play out in rural Ecuadorian households as presented by policy and development discourse.

By extension, opportunities for stable labor in the rural Andes potentially strengthens rural livelihoods in general, tapping into the strength of social capital (Bebbington, 1999, 2001). Bebbington presents a relevant concept of the “globalized Andes”, pointing to the fact that rural communities in the Andes are increasingly connected to the global network through globalization in a process that is actually active, rather than passive, as presented in policy and development literature. Rodriguez Castro et al., (2016) similarly discuss this idea with their concept of the “globalized countryside” to describe rural communities in Colombia, with relevance to rural Ecuadorian communities as well. Bebbington (1999) extends these ideas through his discussion of social capital, in which communities draw from not only their human capital (skill sets, experiences, and labor) but also from their social capital, that is, the strong networks that exist or can be created among members of rural communities as well as external actors like NGOs and government institutions

to support individual and collective livelihoods. For example, he describes the development of dairy enterprise in the rural community of Salinas, Ecuador which, tapping into the power of local social capital, rose remarkably quickly in collaboration with international actors, causing a significant change to livelihoods and the landscape through cattle-raising (2001).

### ***Floriculture Challenges***

In addition to the described opportunities, there are also many challenges represented by the cut-flower industry, a few of which will be discussed here. Cultural challenges specific to work in the cut-flower industry are presented by several scholars. Korovkin (2003) describes the difficulty of the labor, both in terms of the types of tasks and the duration of the work, with a schedule that is typically six days a week, leaving limited time for personal activities or taking care of families and daily household tasks. Bedford (2009) also highlights the low pay of cut-flower work (typically at or just above minimum wage, as described) and the issues around the health of workers exposed directly or indirectly to chemicals applied during the flower growing and harvesting process. Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama (2007) also discuss the general low labor standards of the cut-flower industry, potentially in a “race to the bottom” to cut production costs. Knapp (personal communication) has mentioned that cut-flower workers in Ecuador cannot form unions to fight for

labor standards. Such labor challenges highlight questions of sustainability from the social sphere, which will be elaborated further in the following discussion.

Another challenge of the cut-flower industry is both cultural and physical: Both floriculture and agriculture for food production require resources such as land, water, and labor and, therefore, competition for human and physical resources represents a conflict for rural Andean agricultural communities (Mena-Vasconez, Boelens, & Vos, 2016; Partridge, 2016). As mentioned, competition for land resources exists as cut-flower plantations take choice pieces of agricultural land, often inherited from former *haciendas*, relegating local agricultural producers to less viable land on steep mountain slopes (Knapp, 2017; Sawers, 2005). Such practices reinforce historical patterns of land domination by powerful actors, despite land reform laws in earlier decades.

Water, in particular, is a resource in limited supply and, due to climate change, even more scarce today. With the competing needs of fresh water for consumption and for food agricultural production versus to irrigate large cut-flower plantations, tensions arise. Partridge (2016) interviewed informants in rural Andean communities who stated that broccoli and cut-flower plantations required a large amount of the local water supply, conjuring up images of “water-guzzling” agro-export industries. Coupled with the fact that floriculture does not produce food or a product for wide-spread local consumption, tending to instead be shipped to markets in cities or transported abroad, one can see how Andean communities

where such industries are based would be troubled by their existence. Mena-Vasconez et al., (2016) present the issue as a “food or flowers” battle in which local communities must fight with cut-flower business owners for the right to water to ensure food security and sovereignty, navigating the judicial system, with a 2014 Water Law supposedly “prioritising food production over flowers’ industrial water uses” (2016:227).

### **Ecuador and Neoliberalism**

An important process to contextualize the cut-flower industry and its effects on people in Ecuador is the process and ideology of neoliberalism. As myriad definitions exist, this thesis takes its definition of neoliberalism from Carte, Mcwatters, Daley, and Torres (2010): “Neoliberalism is characterized by national and international political and economic shifts towards privatization and deregulation, liberalization of foreign investment and trade, reduced public spending on social programs, discontinuation of support for labor collectivization, land reform policies, and export-oriented production” (702). Neoliberalism is important to the story of the cut-flower industry in Ecuador because the industry came to exist during a period of neoliberal economic and political reform in the country, especially in the 1990’s when the administration of President Durán Ballén implemented countrywide “privatization, deregulation and trade liberalization” (Knapp, 2017:4).

Although the industry started without much government support (or regulation) and the small and medium-sized businesses were generally left to their own devices, they were eventually propped up by trade agreements such as the Andean Trade Preference Act of 1991 and the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA) of 2002, which allowed Ecuador to export flowers to the United States without a tariff in exchange for enforcing stronger drug eradication measures (Ibid). As Knapp explains: “[The agreements] were significant not just in terms of making Ecuadorian flowers more competitive in the U.S. market but in removing a time-consuming barrier in the commodity chain; flowers could be loaded onto trucks at the point of arrival without costly delays in processing paperwork and paying fees” (2017:4). Again, while the Ecuadorian government has been mostly hands-off in terms of directly supporting the industry through capital or subsidies (Ibid), particularly the recent pro-Socialist regime of Correa, it has facilitated more neoliberal market practices in the pursuit of modernization that come into conflict with collective, indigenous logics (Mena-Vasconez et al., 2016). In addition, Bedford (2009) argues that while the Ecuadorian government may not have played an active role in supporting the cut-flower industry, the World Bank *did* facilitate the flourishing of this industry as part of its agenda to build up agro-export across the developing world, with interesting consequences for how it viewed women. More discussion of neoliberalism and its discourse takes place in Chapter 2’s literature review.

## **CASE SELECTION**

The majority of the fieldwork informing this thesis centered around the community of Vicundo in Cayambe, Ecuador. Ecuador is a natural choice to study the cut-flower industry because it is one of the top producing countries in the world (Gasselin, 2001). In addition, cut-flower production is concentrated in geographically strategic locations, with Cayambe being the top production zone in the country (Gasselin, 2001; Knapp, 2017). The geographic concentration of flower plantations in Cayambe is due to agriculturally fertile soils from the volcanic material of multiple volcanoes (including *Nevado de Cayambe*), abundant flat land, as well as water resources from its glaciers and nearby *páramo* grasslands (Becker & Tuttillo, 2009; Knapp, personal communication). In addition, Cayambe is in close proximity to the capital Quito, a major center of economic activity and markets, as well as the international airport for easy export to other countries (Knapp, 2017).

## **Cayambe Background**

Cayambe has been the home of indigenous peoples, the largest of which was called the *cara/caranqui*, who were invaded first by the Incans and later by the Spanish conquistadors, before being incorporated into the Republic of Ecuador (Becker & Tuttillo, 2009). Although the population has changed over time, rural areas around



Figure 3. Billboard advertising Cayambe (note flowers featured above the “B”)

Cayambe have remained predominantly indigenous in terms of demographics (Ibid). The region has long pursued agricultural production, due to its fertile soils. The Spanish introduced a feudal system of working the land through *haciendas*, in which mostly indigenous people were obligated to work (*encomienda*) large properties owned by typically wealthy, white or *mestizo* owners in exchange for small plots to grow subsistence crops for their families, often resulting in uprisings (Ibid). Among the differing elevations of the landscape, common crops produced have included milk and more recently flowers (humid valleys), and corn, potatoes, quinoa, wheat, barley, beans and other grains (at higher elevations) (Ibid). Since the rise of the *haciendas*, Cayambe built up a dairy industry, importing cattle breeds from other countries that produced milk with favorable qualities (Sr. Jarrín, personal communication, July 13, 2017). Due to its agricultural basis and limited infrastructure to transport goods to Quito’s markets, Cayambe remained poorer and



less modernized than other regions of Ecuador until recently (Becker & Tuttillo, 2009). Cayambe has grown and urbanized rapidly with the rise of the cut-flower industry starting in the 1980's. Today, in addition to holding title as the epicenter of the cut-flower industry in Ecuador, Cayambe also is known for its dairy products, including milk, cheese (*queso de hoja*) and caramel (*manjar de leche*), which is accompanied by biscuits called *bizcochos*. The advertising billboard in Figure 3 shows off some of the festivities and natural spaces that distinguish Cayambe from other areas in Ecuador. Note that roses are prominently featured among these seven selected elements to celebrate Cayambe.

### **Vicundo Background**

My thesis research focuses on a case study in the community of Vicundo in the Cayambe region. Vicundo was selected as the community of focus due to its proximity to the urban center of Cayambe, the fact that the community is physically surrounded by flower plantations, and the fact that the majority of residents of the community are women who currently work on or have previously worked on flower plantations in the area. In addition, my supervisor, Dr. Knapp, has a strong relationship with the community, and his summer study abroad program visits them annually to participate in community tourism. During my visit to the community in June 2017 with the program, I was welcomed into the community and encouraged to return and stay with community members. Because of this warm reception and

the prevalence of flower plantation workers among residents, I decided to focus my subsequent thesis fieldwork in Vicundo.

Vicundo is a *sector* in the *comunidad* of San Luis de Guachalá, in the *barrio* of La Bola, in the *parroquia* of Cangahua, in the *cantón* of Cayambe, in the *provincia* of Pichincha (Luis, personal communication, July 21, 2017). Vicundo is named after the bromeliad called *vicundo*, which grows throughout the area.<sup>4</sup> It is located along the Pan American Highway northeast of Quito on the road to Cayambe. Vicundo is located in the Andean mountain range, with an altitude of 9,022 feet above sea level (2,700 msnm), with temperatures ranging from 15 to 23 degrees Celsius throughout the year.<sup>5</sup> It is near the historical *Hacienda Guachalá*. Vicundo is a small community with some notable characteristics. First, I was told that most members of the community belong to one extended family, sharing the last name. As a result, the community is very close-knit. Second, the community participates in a community tourism project to promote Vicundo to outside visitors. This project is an effort to preserve local cultural traditions and knowledge, as well as to generate extra income for community members. The next paragraphs explain this project in more depth. Third, the majority of Vicundo's households are run by women, often single women who have separated from their husbands. For example, three of my informants are all the sole heads of their households, raising children and grandchildren of various

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<sup>4</sup> <http://vicundo0latitud.blogspot.com/2014/10/general-information-about-vicundo.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

ages. One divorced her husband and another informant and her spouse are separated and live in different countries. A third informant lives with her husband and father-in-law, and she plays an active role in the community tourism initiative through cooking, hosting tourists, and organizing games and activities. In this sense, one could consider Vicundo a mostly matriarchal community. The implications of these characteristics will be explored in the Chapter 4 case study.

While small, Vicundo is on the map (so to speak) due to several points of interest. One point of interest is an alternative equatorial monument called *Quitsato*, which is actually more geographically correct than its more popular cousin *Mitad del Mundo*. Ecuadorian and international tourists visit this monument daily, which was established by Cristobal Cobo and is staffed by community members who are eager to share their knowledge of astronomy and alternative geographical maps of the world. The group is working to promote Cobo's map that rotates traditional maps so that East is at the top, rather than North.<sup>6</sup> Other points of interest in Vicundo include a deer sanctuary (*criadero de venado*), two zoos with birds such as emus, ostrich, and parrots, an insectarium, and a swimming pool. Residents are also building stands to serve refreshments such as local ice creams, fried potato chips and plantains, as well as soft drinks to visitors. Members of Vicundo are working to recover their gastronomic traditions, which include *sopa de cebada tostada*, *habas*

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<sup>6</sup> This alternative disrupts the Global North-South orientation promoted by Western countries, placing countries on a more even playing field in terms of power.

*con queso* and *asado de cuy* (Luis, personal communication, July 21, 2017). These practices are combined with agricultural practices that promote traditional and local varieties of crops, coupled with tourism that encourages domestic and international tourists and volunteers to participate in agritourism by helping out in family gardens (Torres, 2003), a project in development. The area is full of traditional celebrations that are still celebrated, including *Fiesta de San Pedro (Inti Raymi)* and *Las Octavas* which is celebrated in the summer over the course of eight weeks (Ibid).

## MOTIVATION

In the summer of 2010, I conducted fieldwork for my undergraduate honors thesis on the spread of organic agriculture in a small agricultural community north of Quito called Perucho. Before reaching Perucho, I passed by a large flower plantation, which I later learned was a significant source of employment for the community. I distinctly remember the smell of this plantation through the open window of the bus: a sweet, artificial odor pervading the area that I came to associate with chemical application. Because I was studying organic, chemical-free agriculture at the time, I was not interested in flower production, which relies heavily on chemical use. I tried to ignore the flower plantation in disdain, but I could not escape it during my fieldwork. For example, one of my informants was a bus driver for flower plantation workers. One day he invited me to accompany him while he picked up the workers at the end of the work day. I agreed, and I remember driving

up to the plantation, heavily guarded by tall fences and security guards at the entrance. My informant told me to keep a low profile as he greeted the guards and entered the plantation compound. I was shocked by the high security of the plantation. Why would something growing in the ground be so heavily guarded?

Despite asking focused questions about organic agriculture in my interviews, informants continued to refer to the flower plantation and how it affected their agricultural practices and lives. In most cases, this relationship was competitive and conflictual. I included these findings in my undergraduate thesis, but I did not think about them more deeply until I returned to graduate school in 2016 and learned about my supervisor's work on the cut-flower industry in Ecuador over the last decades. He shared his most recently published article, *Mountain Agriculture for Global Markets: The Case of Greenhouse Floriculture in Ecuador* (2017), which made me reflect on my previous research.

Originally, my Master's thesis research focused on a different country, after a negative experience with a male informant during fieldwork in Ecuador made me apprehensive about ever returning. However, when Dr. Knapp selected me to serve as a teaching assistant for his Ecuador Maymester program in June 2017, I decided to seize the opportunity and to refocus my Master's research, throwing myself into research on the flower plantations I had previously ignored. I decided to study the experience of women in the industry because they make up the majority of the workers (Korovkin, 2003) and because I felt safer talking with women. Additionally,

Dr. Knapp pointed out that as a woman, I would likely face fewer barriers talking with female informants than if I was a male researcher.

### **WHY CARE?**

From an intellectual standpoint, much has been written about floriculture and its women workers in Ecuador, including Ecuadorian student theses and research from a feminist perspective (Bedford, 2009; Knapp, 2015, 2017, Korovkin, 2003, 2004; Mena Pozo, 1999; Sawers, 2005, see also Chapter 2). Some studies have focused on the economic opportunities presented by the industry, health and safety issues of cut-flower labor and pesticide exposure, as well as traditional commodity chain analyses of this – non-edible – commodity. My research extends this literature and furthers the debates about the effects of flower work on female workers, which have ranged from arguments of exploitation to arguments of empowerment, economic and otherwise. The project offers a feminist geographic approach to studying the industry and the experiences of its women workers through a focus on deep, embodied narratives that give voice to women often treated as data points and reduced to statistics in past literature, taking into account issues such as power, gender, race, and class, which are very much rooted in agricultural pasts, presents, and futures. This project represents a critical commodity chain analysis that allows me to view the cut-flower industry in multiple directions, making visible links of the chains that would traditionally be ignored, including the lives and livelihoods of cut-

flower workers and the local community. From a social and political standpoint, over the next decades, Ecuador will continue to face trends of urban bias and migration, as well as changes to agricultural production and struggles to maintain food security (Carrión & Herrera, 2012). Floriculture represents a high-value, multi-million-dollar agricultural enterprise that is significantly affecting the physical and cultural landscape of Andean Ecuador. As this industry continues to grow, how can we think about this type of agricultural production (non-traditional and primarily for export) in the context of sustainable landscapes? Does floriculture represent a potentially 'sustainable' solution for maintaining rural Andean livelihoods?

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT**

Because flower plantations in Ecuador are generally heavily guarded, it is difficult to gain access to them, as a researcher and especially as a foreigner. I was able to gain access to a few plantations through arrangements made by my supervisor, as well as a tour guide. However, these visits were highly structured and monitored by owners and managers, with limited interaction with the workers themselves. Therefore, I was only able to observe the work and write down my observations, which are full of assumptions based on my positionality as a research and an outsider, as well as the presentation given by the guide in a position of power on the plantation. I was not able to discuss my observations with workers but instead relied on what I *think* I saw during these visits. Relatedly, I did not feel

comfortable directly asking informants about how they identify, such as gender, race, class, and age, so I had to infer what I could from my observations and what was shared with me during interviews. Similarly, I did not want to press informants for sensitive information. Instead, I tried to create a safe and comfortable environment in which informants could share with me what they desired.

This project presents the discourses of informants' experiences through their narratives. That is, they shared the information they wanted to share and framed this information in the way that they wanted. Therefore, I present the discourses of these narratives and experiences as they were presented to me, through a trained and critical lens. In addition, I focus on a small sample of informants of limited diversity sharing more in-depth narratives, rather than a large sample. While these narratives represent the lived realities of my informants, they are limited to discourse that in no way can be generalized to represent the experience of all or even many flower plantation workers. I share my findings here to represent a case study, a snapshot into the diverse experiences of female flower workers in Ecuador.

Finally, I am bound in certain ways by my positionality as a white, female, non-native-Spanish-speaking, American researcher. As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter on methodology, while my positionality affords me some privilege, it also marks me as an outsider and creates boundaries in how I present myself and how I am received. I acknowledge the privilege of this position and how it may affect how people interact with me. For example, I am sure that it was easier



to enter flower plantations as a white, English-speaking researcher from the Global North with my older, white male advisor. The fact that I was visiting Ecuador from my home country conveyed a sense of financial resources, even if the fieldwork was funded by a scholarship and my stipend as a teaching assistant. In addition, while I tried to communicate that informants were in no way obligated to speak with me and share their experiences, as per the IRB informed consent process, my positionality certainly affected the power dynamic in the situation as a researcher.

#### THESIS STRUCTURE

The rest of this thesis is structured as follows: **Chapter 1** introduces the thesis project, research questions, definitions of key terms, hypotheses, background on Ecuador agriculture, flower industry, and neoliberalism, case selection, motivation and value of the research, limitations of the project, and thesis structure.

**Chapter 2** provides a review of the literature, both theories relevant to analyzing the study, as well as the strengths and critiques of existing literature of the cut-flower industry in Ecuador and how my study fits into this literature. It also discusses in detail my methodology, which employs a feminist geographic approach.

**Chapter 3** is the first empirical chapter, which explores flower production and the experiences of different actors in the same space of the flower plantation. It progresses through different roles on flower plantations and fieldnotes from my tour

of three different flower plantations, discussing power dynamics and the extension of colonial *hacienda* legacies in these spaces.

**Chapter 4** highlights a case study of the experiences of women from the community of Vicundo who work in the flower industry, discussing the ways in which they navigate the work to improve their lives. It also presents the counternarrative of their community tourism initiative as an alternative source of income and a way to preserve their traditions.

**Chapter 5** is the final empirical chapter, which looks at the end of the cut-flower commodity chain at markets and consumption. It explores the sale of flowers to domestic and international markets in a tiered, hierarchical system, then explores consumption by clients in the Global North through a short visual discourse analysis of a flower company's marketing materials. The chapter ends with a feminist commodity chain analysis, flipping the direction of the chain.

Finally, **Chapter 6** brings together the findings of the study, providing final conclusions based on the theory and ideas presented, including a revisit to the overarching research questions, the main takeaways of the thesis, and new questions posed for future studies on the cut-flower industry in Ecuador.



## CHAPTER 2: Literature and Feminist Geographic Approach

*"[I]n feminist commodity chain analysis, global commodities are understood as having to work both materially and semiotically across their multi-sited lives in production and consumption. Feminist commodity chain analysis recognizes the relationality between the material and the cultural and the contingency of that relationship. It deploys gender as an analytic of power to track the open-endedness, contingency, and rupture of commodity chains...[F]eminist commodity chain analysis offers a commentary on globalization that is more differentiated, layered and complicated than realist commodity chain analysis"*

- Ramamurthy (2004:743), on the power of feminist commodity chain analysis (FCCA)

In this chapter, I review previous frameworks and results of studies of women on flower plantations in Ecuador to begin to situate my own study in the literature. The chapter starts by reviewing theoretical literature that is relevant for understanding the project. This project explores the following framing strands of theoretical literature: gender, development and agriculture; feminist political economy of labor; and feminist political ecology. The chapter then goes on to expand on cut-flower literature, discussing the spectrum of positions that past scholars have taken on the industry and its effects of women workers. After outlining this spectrum, the chapter discusses the feminist geographic approach

used by the study, including the specific methodology employed during fieldwork and later analysis in writing up the thesis.

#### **RELEVANT THEORETICAL LITERATURE**

Feminist literature on gender and development discusses how traditionally women were often ignored in early development projects, which focused on men and how to improve their livelihoods. However, when women began to be “added in” to the development agenda, according to literature on Women in Development (WID), the process was messy and often made their lives harder (Kabeer, 1994; Leach, 2007). This dynamic becomes especially problematic in the case of agriculture, for which the majority of food producers and preparers worldwide are women. In many cases, women have carved out roles for themselves that allow them to establish some sort of status and/or livelihood. Efforts to intervene in the name of ‘empowering’ women have often resulted in creating more work and less authority. Carney (1993) traces such agricultural development gone wrong in The Gambia, explaining how NGOs disrupted traditional land use and agricultural activities organized by gender, in which women traditionally maintained control of certain lands for food production, placing more of a burden of work on women while simultaneously limiting their access and economic benefit. Ironically, a concerted effort to “add women in” to the development agenda reduced their economic and social opportunities rather than expanding them (Ibid).

Extending the neoliberal ideology of WID discourse, we see a coopting process in which neoliberal ideology absorbs concepts like gender and empowerment into its language while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal structures that subordinate women. In the process, we get terms like Rankin's (2001) 'rational economic woman' and Cornwall, Gideon, and Wilson's (2008) 'good woman', a woman who cares for her family, bearing an added burden of individual responsibility to obtain and provide resources within the changing economic structure. "Women are simultaneously hailed as resourceful providers, reliable micro-entrepreneurs, cosmopolitan citizens, and positioned as 'disposable domestics', the exploited global workforce, and as displaced, devalued and disenfranchised diasporic citizens" (Hawkesworth in Cornwall et al., 2008:2-3). By bringing women into the spotlight and the focus of development agendas within a patriarchal neoliberal framework, more damage is done by pushing all these roles onto women, loosening state safety nets and forcing women to go it alone.

Feminist works on the political economy of labor have emphasized the invisibilization of women's labor in order to further masculinist projects proclaiming modernity and the 'inevitable' spread of capitalism. For example, Wright (2004) and England and Stiell (1997) have traced this phenomenon for women sex workers in Ciudad Juarez and foreign domestic workers in Toronto, respectively. Wright's work is of particular interest for its analysis of how women navigate space and larger societal structures in order to maintain their livelihoods

as sex workers, much as women in the cut-flower industry must navigate work in the industry and strategically carve out livelihoods for themselves that allow them to stay in Andean communities. In England's work women are left behind in the sense of being circumscribed to the domestic sphere, with work that is not valued or counted.

Ramamurthy (2004) again proves illuminating for this project through her discussions of political economy and global commodity chains. She explores the intersection of these larger structures through a visual and textual analysis of a Land's End advertisement. Much can be learned about the dominant discourse she critiques in her analysis, such as the creation of the Other, the call for a moral consumer, and the division between First World consumers and Third World producers (Ibid). She breaks down divisions between the so called 'public' sphere of commerce with the 'private' home sphere, arguing that everything is linked through people's lives and daily actions. Particularly relevant, Ramamurthy discusses how cotton production in India is highly gendered, with girls tasked with the "floral sex work" of cross-pollinating cotton flowers: "The naturalization of girls' labor as particularly suited to hybrid cotton cross-pollination is socially constructed by both the seed producers and laborers around the girls' 'nimble fingers'...The girls' 'quickness' and 'agility' in moving between the plants in a densely cropped field are also reasons why they are 'naturally suited to the work'" (759). This is a powerful discourse that seeks to justify targeting of women for such repetitive, detail-oriented

work as agriculture or the factory floor, presenting the labor as ‘natural’ based on so-called gendered abilities. I will revisit this idea in more detail in Chapter 3.

From my reading, it appears that feminist political economy literature has focused more on urban or industrial settings, with less attention given to work in rural settings. This strand of literature offers exciting and refreshing insights by placing it within the rural context of floriculture in Andean Ecuador, especially when put into conversation with the final strand of literature: feminist political ecology (FPE). FPE is concerned with the political, social and economic factors that affect human interactions with their environment, offering a rich framework with which to understand social and environmental phenomena through a political lens. Feminist political ecologists offer an in-depth analysis of these interactions that take into account power dynamics and social constructions of gender, race, class and more (Elmhirst, 2011; Mollett & Faria, 2013). The literature looks at the differentiated experience of men and women to their environment, particularly their access to resources and how that is mediated by power structures of politics and society. In contrast to feminist political economy, my reading has been that FPE has focused more on rural spaces as related to the ‘environment’.

Nightingale (2006) uses an FPE approach to study community forestry in Nepal, illuminating a gendered conflict over the harvesting of leaf litter, considered ‘women’s work’ and tied into caste roles. In many ways, the conflict and resistance to proscribed roles is messy because acknowledgement of power structures is

necessary to move beyond the power in some way. Mollett and Faria (2013) go a step even further to argue that we include analysis of race and racism into this framework, an aspect of experience that has so far been missing from many debates in feminist political ecology. They are insightful to point out a political motive behind its previous omission: “there is a longstanding political wariness around highlighting difference among women for fear that this will create infinite categories of experience and limit the ability to build coalitions” (4). Development discourse and white privilege have universalized the woman experience; but it is important address how racial power affects peoples’ experiences. Finally, Jarosz (2011) also applied a FPE framework to study the role of women in community supported agriculture in the US, particularly the concept of ethics of care as a set of values to motivate such activities. Her piece provides insights into the interaction of women with their environment in cases of agriculture and food production, although it fell short of discussing deeper issues of race, class, and gender that are essential to studying agriculture.

A critical reflection that puts these theoretical strands into conversation with each other takes place in the final chapter of this thesis. The reflection discusses how they inform this study on the cut-flower industry, based on the findings described in the chapters that follow. The next section extends flower literature beyond the background discussion in Chapter 1 provided to give context on the industry. It includes the spectrum of positions on the industry and its effects on



women workers that create the basis for the multiple hypotheses presented in Chapter 1, also to be evaluated in the concluding chapter.

#### **EXTENDING FLOWER LITERATURE**

Literature on the cut-flower industry in Ecuador and its effects on women workers fall along a spectrum of positions, from highly positive and ‘empowering’ to women, to negative, critical and highly exploitative to women, with a more balanced perspective that acknowledges some aspects of both in between the two extremes. This section reviews each stance in turn, with scholars highlighted along the way, starting with highly positive works.

In addition to their definition of neoliberalism (see Chapter 1), Carte, Mcwatters, Daley, and Torres (2010) also provide a description of its discourse: “In exchange, neoliberal ideology strives for self-sufficient individualism among workers by limiting the role of the state and the power of labor unions and by encouraging mobility and flexible employment as means to individuals’ economic independence” (702). Some of the earlier literature on the cut-flower industry uses a traditional neoliberal lens to analyze the industry and its effects, taking on much of this language. A prime example of this approach is Newman et al.’s (2001) study of the effects of the flower industry on women, which was funded by the World Bank. They take a more empirical approach to their study, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to conclude that while there are challenges

and difficulties associated with flower work (see previous section), overall, they are better off and even ‘empowered’ through their new-found financial opportunity and ability to provide for and make decisions for themselves and their families through changing gender roles that grant women more leadership in the household. Such analysis focuses on the individual, rather than the community, and it places the burden on the person to make ends meet. Friedemann-Sánchez (2006), whose study of the industry in Colombia provides insight into the industry in Ecuador, also took a favorable view of the industry and its effects on women. She argued that work in flowers reduces gender inequalities, empowering women in both their professional and personal lives (2006). Friedemann-Sánchez also found that the lives of female flower workers’ children improved because their mothers could invest in their children (2006). While this side of the literature does acknowledge some negative aspects of working in the industry, it tends to conclude that overall, the positives outweigh the negatives, especially stating that women benefit and are ‘empowered’ by the financial opportunities of flower work. In this way, this literature tends to represent women more as agentive, that is, active in changing their circumstance through their work and decision-making about how to use their income to improve their living conditions and that of their families.

Other literature on the cut-flower industry takes a more balanced, pro-and-con perspective, including Knapp's (2017) recent review, which discusses both the economic opportunities and the health challenges posed by chemical exposure,

arguing that overall, the success of cut-flower industry in Ecuador shows that Andean mountain agriculture is not doomed. Ziegler (2007) also discusses the industry with a balanced tone in her book tracing the global commodity chain of flowers. She points out the long hours, challenges in maintaining family and community obligations, and occupational hazards, while at the same time, highlighting the employment opportunities, income, and newfound skills they learn on the job. This approach takes neither a strongly positive nor strongly negative stance, but rather meets in the middle, acknowledging both flower opportunities and challenges. As such, this literature also suggests some level of agency among female flower workers, that they have to make the best of the benefits and weather through the challenges it presents.

On the other end of the spectrum, other scholars take a more critical stance on the cut-flower industry and its effects on women workers, pointing out the negatives. Korovkin (2003) mentions the argument that women have more economic opportunities through employment and income through flower work, but she remains critical about the industry's effects on women's time budgets and social relations, that is, how little time they are able to devote to caring for their children, and how they must sacrifice participating in community activities they were active in before entering the industry. Extending this critique, her work with Sanmiguel-Valderrama (2007) on labor standards in the Ecuadorian and Colombian flower industries argues that these industries are in a 'race to the bottom', pressuring

workers to work faster and harder to be more productive, with few opportunities to push back through labor unions. In this sense, pressure to compete on global markets translates into increasing exploitation of flower workers, who are majority women (Ibid). Mena Pozo (1999) also takes a more critical position on the industry, acknowledging the increased financial freedom of female workers, while emphasizing the negative effects: the inability to adequately care for children, to participate in the community and to have time for agricultural pursuits, resulting in “anxiety, depression, guilt, [and] stress” (11). She argues that these women face more exploitation than ‘empowerment’, “easily replaceable” with plenty of potential hires ready to work (11). They are further exploited through their hazardous exposure to chemicals applied to flowers, as well as the risk of being sexually harassed while working on the plantations. Stewart (2007) cites Mena Pozo several times in her journalistic book *Flower Confidential*, taking a decidedly critical position on the flower industry in Ecuador. She sees the work as highly exploitative to women and other workers, highlighting the increasing pressure to produce to high standards, as well as exposure to chemicals, child labor, and incidence of sexual harassment, to the point where she decides that she will boycott purchasing any Ecuadorian flowers in the United States (2007). Finally, Bedford (2009) includes a chapter in her book on the World Bank, critiquing Newman et al. (2001) for what she sees as a highly problematic, neoliberal lens to viewing the flower industry, one which emphasizes the woman individual and celebrates the supposed success of her economic

‘empowerment’ and changes in gender relations, which give her a leadership role in the family. Bedford sees this lens as carrying out the World Bank’s neoliberal ideology, packaged as a positive opportunity for women (2009). Bedford argues that the World Bank has promoted Ecuador’s flower export industry as part of its “gender intervention”, hiring gender researchers, such as Newman, to study and justify the industry by framing it as an economic opportunity for work, while fulfilling its agenda of promoting agro-export in the developing world (Ibid, p. 104). While some of these scholars do acknowledge the benefits of flower work, they tend to speak with a much more critical tone in their analysis of its effects, viewing women more as exploited, pushed down rather than lifted up by their participation in the industry. In doing so, they tend to represent women as passive victims affected by external factors beyond their control.

A critical, feminist approach questions the foundations of neoliberal ideology and its discourse, suggesting how neoliberalism might be disrupted. Carte et al., (2010) point out that in academia, neoliberalism has been generalized when, in fact, the reality is that there are many neoliberalisms depending on where one looks, citing Larner (2003). They also discuss Martin’s (2005) idea that neoliberalism occurs through scale and in many spaces, an important contribution to geographic thinking. Of relevance to this study, Carte et al. (2010) and Martin (2005) provide a useful method for considering how neoliberalism may operate on a more local scale, which is “the experiential nature of neoliberalism” (in Carte et al., 2010:702). That is,

one must consider how neoliberalism is experienced, perceived and navigated by different local actors on the ground. Therefore, this study takes a more embodied, deeper account of work in flowers and how it is experienced by the people who work in the industry, creating a platform for women's voices and highlighting nuance, extending scholars' work discussed in this section, along with those in Chapter 1.

### **FEMINIST GEOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY**

Using a feminist geographic approach, this thesis endeavors to trace the experiences of people working in the cut-flower industry and how they say that the work affects their lives and livelihoods in Ecuador's Andean landscape from their perspective. The project seeks to document the discourse of women participating in the cut-flower industry in Andean Ecuador, all of whom are affected by this type of agricultural production. In order to capture deeper, more embodied experiences and accounts of work in flower plantations than much of the past literature, this thesis take a humanistic, qualitative and ethnographic approach. My main methods for collecting data included: (1) semi-structured, open-ended interviews with informants, (2) participant observation with informants, including spending time in their homes, on their land, or traveling in their community, (3) visits to flower plantations, (4) photography of informants in their homes, flower plantations and people working on them, (5) journaling and writing fieldnotes of learned

information and reflections, and (6) collection of primary and secondary literature on the flower industry and labor, including newspaper articles, books, and theses.

The most illuminating method of data collection was the semi-structured interview. I interviewed 20 informants connected to the cut-flower industry in order to better capture multiple experiences and how different people are affected by the industry in various ways. If the informant consented to recording<sup>7</sup>, I audio-recorded the interview<sup>8</sup>; if they did not, I took notes in my field journal or wrote down a summary of the conversation after the interview when I could not take notes. I was especially interested in understanding the experience and livelihood of female cut-flower workers, who make up the majority of workers. Starting with an ex-cut-flower worker I connected with while I served as a teaching assistant on the Maymester study abroad program in the country, I employed a 'snowball' method to meet additional informants. I wanted informants to feel free to share what they wanted of their story and experiences on flower plantations without forcing too much direction (Buttimer, 1976). From my experience, this flexible approach meant informants shared more interesting and, in some cases, more intimate details than in a structured interview format.

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<sup>7</sup> According to protocol outlined in my project's IRB proposal (see Appendix)

<sup>8</sup> The following chapters include many quotations. If something an informant said comes with quotation marks, it is a direct quote that was audio-recorded and transcribed. If it does not have quotation marks, it is paraphrased from the notes I took in my field journal either during or following the interview.

This project is centered around discourse, that is, how people describe their experience, ideas, and perceptions about the cut-flower industry and its effects on their livelihoods. Discourse is a fascinating topic to study, particularly around how people talk about the(ir) environment. Nightingale (2003) points out that in many cases, “discourses provide conflicting descriptions of the same piece of land, drawing into question how they are generated and contested” (529). I find this concept fascinating, to explore the various ways that people describe the same situation and live in different realities; it makes me think about the power structures that feminist political ecology analyzes. While dominant figures often determine the overarching discourse, we may each have unique ideas and ways to describe a situation. The conversation gets even more complex when we consider instances in which “the same people invoke contradictory beliefs and identities” (529), illuminating how the social-political-ecological all come into play within various contexts to affect how people decide to talk and act. I found Nightingale’s discussion of discourse related to environmental conditions to be highly relevant, and I wanted to be sensitive to this idea of contradictory discourses within thinking about my research project.

In addition to my interviews, I also found participant observation to be an informative tool for my research in the field. I made sure to separate interactions with people while they were working in the flower plantations with those when people were off the plantations, in their homes and communities. I did not want to keep people from their work, and I felt that people would be more comfortable to



share their experiences when they were not in spaces dominated by power dynamics of management. Therefore, when I visited flower plantations, I observed the space and the work and listened to the guides speak, taking notes and approved photographs. When I was outside the plantations, I visited informants in their homes and offices to chat with them in spaces of comfort. In many cases I was invited to share meals, visit gardens and farms and travel to nearby towns to see traditional celebrations, which I gladly accepted. I attempted to visit and spend a significant amount of time with informants before interviewing them to get to know them better and to build rapport in a more natural way to mess with the researcher-researched dynamic. These visits also illuminated the depth of informants and their lives, enriching my accounts of them beyond their work in the cut-flower industry.

I see my focus as fitting in well with the feminist approach of “embodied subjectivity” and capturing the everyday experience of people (Wolf, 1996). I drew heavily from Wolf’s influential work *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork* in order to inform my fieldwork approach and experience. She discusses three dimensions of power embodied in the research process:

- (1) Power differences stemming from different positionalities of the researcher and the researched (race, class, nationality, life chances, urban-rural backgrounds);
- (2) power exerted during the research process, such as defining the research relationship, unequal exchange, and exploitation; and

(3) power exerted during the postfieldwork period – writing and representing  
(1996:2)

I sought to keep these dimensions of power at the forefront of my work, including awareness of my positionality as a privileged, white, female scholar coming from the United States, recognizing dynamics of race, class, gender, sexuality and other dynamics that affect interactions and relationships in the field. To this end, I drew from the work of Faria and Mollett (2014) to engage “critical feminist reflexivity” and consider how whiteness is power-laden and emotional. To the extent that I was able, I tried to cultivate “friendship, sharing, and closeness” with informants in order to trouble the researcher-researched binary and to more fully understand peoples’ life experiences and their own positionality (England & Stiell, 1997; Wolf, 1996:4). I also participated in daily activities in the community like cooking and harvesting from the garden, volunteering where it was appropriate and encouraged.

Cut-flower plantations are typically heavily guarded, with high fences and security guards, to protect the high-value commodity grown within. To the extent that I was able to gain access, I visited 5 plantations in Guayllabamba, Cayambe and Tabacundo, the epicenter of cut-flower production in Ecuador. One visit was arranged as an educational fieldtrip with the UT Maymester program, one was organized with a tour guide who arranges trips for tourists on the *Ruta de Rosas*, and one was facilitated by an informant who wishes to keep their identity

anonymous. These plantations ranged in size from 5 hectares to hundreds of hectares, with various flowers in production, such as roses, baby's breath and delphinium. However, they shared common characteristics in terms of production, division of labor and job responsibilities. A more detailed description and analysis of these plantations follows in Chapter 3.

Overall, I relied on the method of progressive contextualization (Vayda, 1983) to guide my fieldwork, starting with a broad view of the flower industry and slowly narrowing the focus of my work through a progression of conversations, interviews, visits and review of literature. Relatedly, I formed a set of multiple working hypotheses (Chamberlin, 1965), which are stated in the previous chapter. The advantage of employing progressive contextualization and multiple working hypotheses is that they allow the researcher to enter fieldwork with an open mind, with fewer assumptions and preconceived notions about the topic of research, responding to what he or she learns in a more organic way.

International field research is a fitting process to explore the intersections and enmeshing of the global with the intimate (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006; Pratt & Rosner, 2006). One can think of the intimate experience of the individual researcher going out into the world as well as the “global” coming into intimate spaces and experiences in a particular place. Through this process, Pratt and Rosner's (2006) ideas come to life: boundaries begin to blur as one situates herself in the process. They explain how the exterior nature of research is “clinical”, yet it encapsulates a

personal experience that is “emotional” and “overwhelming” (18). The authors describe “how the research project cleanly formulated back in the university’s protective environs can deform, transform, or engulf the fieldworker as she proceeds” (18). It was critical to conduct on-the-ground fieldwork in Ecuador in order to better understand life there and to approach my research questions. I knew that I would read about and research as much as I could during the spring semester to inform a historical, political, social, economic (and more) context. But I was intuitively aware of the University and its own intimate space with its (dis)ability to shape an idealization of a project from afar.

I am intrigued by the style of writing these authors’ wish to encourage, “a more intimate genre of writing: immediate, sensual, and not yet stabilized within a fixed interpretation” (18). Writing about travel or global concepts in a personal, intimate way is an active method for carrying out juxtaposition and boundary-blurring as described by the authors. While typically fieldnotes represent a practice to record observations and data during research, Pratt and Rosner suggest a more integrative approach to include reactions, imaginings, anecdotes, and more. This humanistic approach follows in the tradition of Yi-Fu Tuan, such as his study *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977). I took this approach into the field, making sure to write down not just facts and notes from interviews but also my reactions, questions, and ideas *in response to* the people and places I encountered.

These responses guided me in reflecting on what I was experiencing, both in the field and when I returned to the University.

Beyond the above-mentioned methods used in the field, I employed a critical commodity chain analysis approach to analyze the data collected in the field. This type of analysis looks beyond traditional one-way analysis of commodity chains (producer to consumer) to consider agency all along the chain. I drew upon Ramamurthy's (2004) work on feminist commodity chain analysis (FCCA) to frame this analysis. Ramamurthy argues for FCCA as an alternative to what she calls "realist" commodity chain analysis, effectively troubling its one-way direction and production/consumption binary (Ibid). Instead, the effort of FCCA is to make visible women's labor, include gender ideologies, and to recognize the extent to which globalization occurs in intimate, everyday lives as well as at the macro scale (Ibid).

Use of FCCA allowed me to view the cut-flower industry in multiple directions, exploring how cut-flower production links back to the lives and livelihoods of its workers and members of the local community who are affected in various ways by its existence. For example, while cut-flower workers produce a product, they also are consumers and consume themselves. This is a piece of the chain that would be rendered invisible by traditional commodity chain analysis, but which represents an equally significant part of the overall story of the industry. I also explored ideas of consumption in the sense of the consumption of flowers as an

economic commodity, as well as the consumption of other products such as food, land and other itemse.

In this sense, the chain flows in multiple directions, touching myriad lives in different ways, calling upon Katz's (2001) idea of 'countertopography'. 'Countertopography', in contrast to traditional geographic topography, is "scale-jumping and geography-crossing...to counter the imperial, patriarchal, and racist integument of globalization" (1216). The idea is to trouble notions of hierarchy and disconnection present in dominant discourse of globalization (Gibson-Graham, 2006), instead considering connections and agency among the many actors involved (Faria, 2017; Katz, 2001). Rodriguez Castro, Pini, and Baker (2016) further this idea through their concept of the 'global countryside' to remark on the dynamics between globalization and the lives of *campesinxs* in rural Colombia. They critique traditional neoliberal export literature that makes invisible the agency and lives of people in the countryside while simultaneously presenting a narrative of women's empowerment through their participation in agricultural export industries. Instead, the authors propose a focus on the "uneven geographies of place as both shaping and being shaped by global forces" (1550).

Finally, I employed the method of visual discourse analysis in Chapter 5 to analyze online marketing materials of a flower company in Ecuador, using the concepts and techniques of Gillian Rose in her seminal text *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. In this text, she suggests

viewing images in four ways: at the site of production, image, circulation and audiencing (2016). Faria (2008) puts this method into practice through a critical discourse analysis of anti-HIV/AIDS campaign materials in Ghana that idealize women as protectors of the nation. I used this approach to draw conclusions about how the flower company presents flowers and draws desire among international consumers, which is discussed in detail in the chapter.



### CHAPTER 3: Flower Production and Experience of Different Actors

*“We drive up to this fancy white hacienda built in the early 1900s with a cathedral attached. They have an elaborate garden, complete with a water fountain...We enter the gates of the greenhouses, which are guarded. A security guard hands us visitor passes...A sign says beware of suspicious people at the entrance... Then we returned to the hacienda, where I saw a worker putting a huge bouquet of fresh roses in the doorway...At another plantation, our guide says that they use mules to carry the flowers around the plantation. As we pass the workers resting on the field below mules eating grass on a hill, she says that they have their good workers, pointing to the mules, and then they have workers, pointing to the people, as a joke. The guide has lighter skin than most of the workers, who have darker skin.”*

- Excerpt from fieldnotes July 13, 2017

*“In much of Latin America, large landed estates called haciendas dominated the countryside from the colonial period through the mid-twentieth century. Peasant laborers lived and worked on these estates in serflike conditions. In the Ecuadorian Andes, most hacienda laborer were Quichua-speaking indigenous people...Landlords’ control over the Runa was reinforced by the latter’s lack of economic alternatives, political power, or easy access to the legal system...the state carried out an agrarian reform in the 1960s and the 1970s...Yet, large estates still survive in some areas...Even where peasants now own the land, the old hacienda system has had an enduring impact on rural society, religion and politics.”*

- Lyons, Barry in *Remembering the Hacienda* (3-4)

Literature on women working in floriculture in Ecuador, as cited in the literature review, tend to focus on the meso-scale in order to state broad trends and claims about the industry. To some extent, there may be anecdotes that highlight



the particular experience of research informants. However, in general, the literature does not put emphasis on the unique experience of each woman worker. By contrast, this thesis focuses on a few women through in-depth exploration of each experience, employing feminist methods like deep narratives to provide an embodied account of flower work and its myriad dynamics related to women's lives. Using this approach, my research found that women working in floriculture in Cayambe and beyond indeed have varied experiences, ranging from the very positive to the very negative. They experience divisions of labor and treatment by management based on gender, race, class and age dimensions that continue in the colonial tradition of *haciendas*, combined with more modern dynamics of global export and industrial labor. Wrapped up in this dynamic, and a central theme in feminist work, are power dynamics and how they affect the relationships between people and their environment (Gilmore, 2002; Haraway, 1988; McKittrick, 2006). Power plays an important role in the cut-flower industry, which is explored in this chapter, and woven into discussion of these fuller, more embodied accounts of the work.

The following section is divided into profiles of different positions held on flower plantations, with vignettes to give a range of experiences. These vignettes are not meant to be generalized to all women working in such positions, as I argue that each experience is different. However, I organize the section in this way in order to put into conversation the privileges and opportunities, as well as challenges, that each position affords. The vignettes are followed by analysis and discussion to flesh

out the positions of different actors. The goal of the section is to begin to reveal how actors experience the space of flower plantations differently depending on their positionality. I argue that flower plantations very much follow a gendered, raced, classed, and aged power hierarchy and that those with more privilege tend to have more positive experiences than those with less. In addition, while there have been some opportunities for women to advance to positions with more influence, such as office administration and managers of other areas in the plantations, they still face challenges such as wage discrimination, harassment, and limited opportunities for promotion and advancement compared to male counterparts.

Following this section, I discuss my own observations from visits to flower plantations, including an analysis of gender, race, age, and class dynamics prevalent in these spaces. While these observations are limited in how the plantations were presented to me by plantation owners and managers, they provide insight into the unspoken dynamics at play, especially power differentials. I show how these dynamics follow in the footsteps of the colonial *hacienda* system, which traditionally relied on the exploited labor of local, often indigenous, people to carry out agricultural work for wealthy owners. In many cases, flower plantations have actually converted from previous *haciendas*; while the land use has transitioned, labor structures and practices carry on much of this colonial legacy. Finally, these workers face the threat of losing their jobs in the face of increased innovation and mechanization of the industry as it ‘races to the bottom’, cutting labor costs as much

as possible in a competitive and labor-intensive industry. The chapter ends with my conclusions about the experiences and dynamics discussed.

### **EXPERIENCES OF DIFFERENT ACTORS ON FLOWER PLANTATIONS: ARE WE IN THE SAME SPACE?**

#### ***Owners***

I spoke with three different owners on their respective flower plantations during the course of this fieldwork. As the owners of the plantations, they made the biggest decisions and delegated daily tasks to their managers and supervisors, meaning they did not have to be present all the time. Two of them described having homes in Quito and commuting back and forth between the city and the countryside. Another described his travels to the United States to promote his flower business abroad. Their descriptions of the plantations were about the big picture, the cut-flower industry in global and national terms, major challenges such as weather and economic crises, costs associated with the business and the changing demands of international clients for different varieties and colors. One proudly described the cut-flower industry as a major influence in changing the local economy, bringing lots of employment to many people in the previously depressed region. All three were Ecuadorian, male, and appeared to be well-off individuals. A few plantation



Figure 4. Images of flower plantations owners

owners described during other interviews were identified as foreign, including Colombian and Dutch. Flower workers generally had limited interaction with these owners, describing them in vague terms from a distance, unless they had positions higher in the hierarchy and interacted with them more regularly.

### ***Managers/Supervisors***

Managers or supervisors work a step down from the plantation owner, yet they hold significant power in the space. Their main job is to manage other workers, typically in a step of the process, such as the greenhouse or the post-harvest room. They delegate tasks, keep workers organized and productive, manage conflict and punish undesirable behaviors. I talked with two different managers of plantations who, in contrast to the male owners, were both women. One woman managed the small plantation overall, while the other managed workers in the post-harvest room. The first woman did not speak specifically about her role, but it was clear that she held a lot of power as she strode purposefully throughout the plantation and interacted with other workers. The manager of the post-harvest room spoke highly of the position. She liked managing people, although she noted that people seemed more 'committed' to the work than they do now. She has been in this supervisory position for several years, and it seems to provide her with a sense of leadership and pride. I also spoke with a woman who was promoted to supervisor of the greenhouses and then the post-harvest room. She described the challenge of



Figure 5. Image of flower plantation manager surveying the post-harvest room



Figure 6. Screenshots of office administration workers from *Rosaprima* promotional video, taken July 9, 2017 from company website

managing people, that they did not always listen to her orders, especially because she was younger than them, as well as a woman. However, she described the work in a positive light, especially because it paid well in comparison to average workers. As one would guess, this position was described quite differently by workers serving under managers. Some informants described how they walked around observing peoples' work, making sure they were doing what they were supposed to. They held the power to punish workers by making them stay after the official end of the work day or docking their pay for not meeting quotas. They were also described as having the power and discretion to determine whether workers would be paid for extra hours worked during busy periods, despite national labor laws. One informant said that managers were all men in her plantation, while I spoke with several women who served as managers in various posts of their respective plantations.

### ***Office Administration***

Four women spoke with me about their experiences working in the offices of their respective plantations, two in southern Ecuador and two who worked in Tabacundo. While they each had different roles, their jobs generally consisted of finance and accounting tasks, as well as interfacing with managers, owners, workers, and international customers. Some had to arrive at the office early in order to interact with clients on a different time zone, such as those clients in Europe. One informant described the "*chicas de ventas*" (the saleswomen) who ran sales in her

office, taking clients out to dinner and traveling to international trade shows, indicating a gendered space carved out for women workers. Interestingly, however, most noted that the offices were fairly balanced between male and female office workers on each plantation. Informants also spoke about office administration having a higher level of education than the workers on the plantations, such as a college degree in finance or administration. Their offices tended to be separate from the location of the plantations, such as in the nearest town or city, which meant that they did not interact as much with the rest of the flower workers aside from owners and managers. While many of the flower workers were from the area surrounding the plantation, the office workers often lived in the nearby city or town, commuting in to the office if it was out of town on a company bus.

They gave more favorable reviews of the work than those who worked in production directly with the flowers. One described the comradery among her coworkers, going out to celebrate birthdays and organizing outings on the weekends. In fact, I met her while she was visiting Vicundo for a company barbeque on the community's camping grounds. However, they did describe how there was a lot of work to be done each day, as well as the challenges associated with being responsible for money and workers' paychecks. Two informants left their positions after about a year or so to pursue higher education and other job opportunities. One described health issues, including headaches, that arose in conjunction with her work in the plantation office, precipitating her decision to leave.



Finally, despite the increase in power and responsibility that women get from working in office administration positions, one informant explained that there is still a gender wage gap between men and women, even if they have the same position and work duties. According to Ecuadorian labor law, this should not be the case, however, she described learning from a female coworker that she and her husband had the same office position in two different flower plantations, yet the husband received a significantly higher wage than the wife. While it is difficult to determine if this is due to gender or the finances of the respective businesses, the fact remains that the woman was paid less for the same labor.

### ***Production***

Workers in production work directly with flowers before they are sent to post-harvest for final processing. Their tasks include planting flowers, tending to flower beds in greenhouses, watering, weeding, clearing debris, and cutting flowers when they reach a stage of maturity. When I asked informants about the gender ratios of various tasks in production, they told me that production had a more gendered division of labor than the office. For example, men tended to apply chemicals and fumigants, while women more often tended the flower beds and cut the flowers for post-harvest. Informants described the work as physically demanding and challenging. One informant who works in an office said that she admired the flower workers in production because of the difficulty of the work. Another informant

working in the office explained that production workers complain about the work and the pay; however, she saw the work as an opportunity that should be appreciated in the greater scheme of things. Workers in production are also involved in pest management and fumigation with pesticides and other chemicals that are typically not organic. One male informant described working with 'dangerous' chemicals but not knowing exactly what they were. Many described physical ailments they experienced that they connected with contact with chemicals applied to the flowers during labor. For example, they described problems with eye pain and vision, pain in their hands and wrists, back problems, and marks on their skin.

In addition, informants in production described a high level of vigilance and surveillance of the production workers by managers and supervisors. They described always being watched and judged on the quality of their work. If they did not work fast and meet their daily quotas, they faced punishment, including having to stay extra hours at the end of the day for no more pay or having their pay docked when they received their paycheck. Their narratives indicated a feeling of being under high pressure to perform, to meet and beat the clock each day or suffer the consequences.



Figure 7. Images of production workers in the greenhouse



Figure 8. Images from the post-harvest room sorting and packing flowers

### ***Post-harvest***

Workers in the post-harvest section of flower plantations are involved in the last steps of processing the flowers before they are shipped out of the plantation to their final destination. Their work includes classifying the flowers according to desired characteristics like stem length, bloom size and color, cutting flower stems, removing thorns, and packing flowers into bunches and bouquets according to client requests. They tend to work indoors in processing rooms with cold rooms to store prepared flowers before transport. In the past, these spaces have been filled predominantly with women workers. When I asked guides why more women worked in this space, many used the discourse that women are more dexterous and better with their hands than men, further discussed in the next section.

I spoke with one informant who worked in the post-harvest room and two informants who supervised this area, along with observations of workers in the post-harvest room during flower plantation visits described in the following section. At the plantations I visited, there tended to be more women than men working in the post-harvest room, although some plantations had a more equal balance between women and men. One informant described the work as challenging to learn how to classify and bunch the flowers into bouquets, a task that required some practice to master. She also described being cold in the post-harvest room, which is refrigerated to protect the flowers after they have been cut and are prepared for transport. All informants who worked in this area described in detail the specific tasks of their

work – how to cut, classify and prepare the flowers in bouquets for shipping – more than workers in any other position, which I found interesting. This final part of the process before transportation is very important, as international clients have high and very specific standards about how they want their flowers to look. Producing quality bouquets according to these standards is essential to the continued success of the flower company and, consequently, the career of the worker.

### **Gender and Power Relations**

As I had read about in the literature on flower and similar commodities, leaders of flower businesses I spoke with used the discourse that women work in flowers, especially cutting, classifying and bunching them, because they have special qualities compared to men. They were described again and again as more dexterous, more detail-oriented, and more careful with the flowers than their male counterparts. This type of discourse, the so-called “nimble fingers” of women and girls, has reinforced the gendered separation of labor in flower production (Bedford, 2009). Females are assumed to have particular, gendered abilities that ‘suit’ them for certain types of work (Ibid). Such discourse allows for both opportunity and exploitation by tagging women as specifically adept at perform this kind of work. This language mirrors that in the work of Ramamurthy (2004) discussed in Chapter 2 for the case of cotton production in India. In her example, young female workers work outside to facilitate a type of sex work through the cross-pollination of flowers

with paintbrushes. In the case of Ecuador, women work indoors in factory-like processing centers, cutting, wrapping, and preparing the flowers for shipping. In both cases, these tasks are repetitive and detail-oriented. Interestingly, I was also told by plantation owners and leaders that the ratio of females to males working in the post-harvest processing rooms is equalizing, with more men taking up this work in the recent past. I am curious to see if the “nimble fingers” discourse continues to be used once these tasks are not performed by majority women and actually become men’s work as well.

While I did not specifically ask my informants questions about abuse and sexual harassment, the issue did come up organically when I told them I was interested in learning about women’s experiences in flower work. One informant who works in an office role described an incident of sexual harassment on her plantation in which a male manager was caught sexually harassing female workers in a concealed closet he built to hide his transgressions. As a result, both the manager and the workers were asked to leave the company. While this incident shows intolerance for sexual harassment discovered in the workplace, it also reveals gendered power relations between men with influence and women who do not have power as flower workers. Women often feel like they cannot speak up about such incidents because of the power and gender dynamics and feel they have to comply in order to keep their job. Unfortunately, this story also reveals that women are punished as well by losing their jobs despite being the victims of the perpetration.

While the extent of sexual harassment and abuse is unclear, another informant shed light on the related issue of gender relations and workplace conduct within an Ecuadorian cultural context. She explained how workplace conduct in a business in Ecuador is very different from that in the United States with regard to interaction and comments between men and women. Women are expected to wear flattering, often short or revealing clothing as their work uniform, especially if they work in banks or offices. I observed women on flower plantations wearing longer clothing, perhaps to protect themselves during the manual labor. However, I was told that men and women still engage in coquettish or flirtatious behavior in these spaces, making comments that would likely be considered sexual harassment in a business in the United States. Nonetheless, she did point out that there is a double-standard in terms of what is appropriate for men to say to women and vice versa, with men having more leeway to make comments about female coworkers.

Finally, two of my informants discussed at length relations between male and female workers in the greenhouses and post-harvest rooms of flower plantations. These are spaces where there is more likely to be interaction between men and women, who may have different tasks but share the same workspace. My informants confirmed my reading that sharing this space means that many flower workers interact and often have relationships. One informant said that when she started working on her plantation, she was young and single and would talk to male workers there, which caused older female workers to develop jealousy. The other informant

said that husbands he had talked to said that they preferred that their wives stay home *en paz* (in peace) instead of working on flower plantations and getting entangled in relations with other workers. Despite this, he knew of workers who had partners on the plantation and at home simultaneously.

#### ***HACIENDA BY ANOTHER NAME: OBSERVATIONS FROM A FLOWER PLANTATION TOUR***

Prior to traveling to Ecuador, my research had indicated that flower plantations are generally private, heavily guarded places surrounded by high fences with armed security guards at the entrance. They are typically not spaces that people, including researchers, can walk up to and expect to enter freely unless they have connections or many prior arrangements. One reason for such strong security is the need to protect proprietary information and trade secrets in an industry that is highly competitive (Knapp, 2017). As such, I expected to have difficulty gaining access to any flower plantations during my fieldwork, perhaps not entering any.

Therefore, I was highly surprised to find out that Ecuador has actually promoted visits to flower plantations for tourists as part of a recent tourism scheme called “*Ruta de las Flores*” (the Route of Flowers) starting in 2011 (“El proyecto Ruta de las Flores fue presentado,” 2010). According to the tour guide I hired to take my advisor and me on an arranged tour, this project has been popular among tourists in past years, although recently interest has decreased and fewer plantations open their doors to visitors (personal communication, July 13, 2017). Of course, I recognize



that these tours are organized to provide a certain, favorable image of the industry to visitors. In effect, the tours serve as a marketing and public relations strategy for flower plantations throughout Ecuador in order to stimulate interest and sales in cut-flower export. This strategy may be in response to negative press on cut-flowers criticizing the industry for its labor conditions and environmental concerns.

With all this in mind, Dr. Knapp, the tour guide, and I visited three flower plantations of various scales and types of flower production around Cayambe and Tabacundo on July 13, 2017. Owners and managers gave us personal tours of the facilities, including greenhouses, post-harvest processing rooms and showrooms, walking us through the process of production. The following are descriptions taken from my fieldnotes, which were written after these visits, along with photographs I was approved to snap during the visits. They give a snapshot of information shared by the tour guides and impressions as created from the perspective of our guides and what they decided to present and disclose to us.

### ***La Compañía – Rosadex***

We drive up to this fancy white hacienda, *La Compañía*, built in the early 1900s with a cathedral attached. They have an elaborate garden, complete with a water fountain. We're met by the husband of the woman whose family owns the hacienda, Jarrín. He takes us first to the greenhouses (*Rosadex*) where they grow roses. We enter the gates of the greenhouses, which are guarded. A security guard hands us visitor passes, which we wear while walking the plantation. A sign says beware of suspicious people at the entrance. They have over 200 workers growing 45 varieties of roses on 24 hectares.



Figure 9. Water fountain outside La Compañía

70 percent of the workers on the plantation are women. They are more delicate and better with details we are told.

Their main clients are the US, Europe, Russia, and China. We are told that the US wants the shortest stems and big blooms, Europe longer stems and Russia even longer stems. China has recently entered the market, and they want dyed flowers in many colors, including rainbow petals. He is optimistic about business, even though the weather (super rainy) and the market haven't been great recently, especially in Russia because of the increase in the value of the dollar.

We are then led to the post-harvest room, where we see an equal number of men and women working, packing roses in bunches of 25 according to stem length,

which are pre-sorted. They staple the cardboard around these bouquets and send them down conveyor belt, where they are collected to be put in the cold room for packing in long boxes and storage, before being transported in cold trucks to the airport. He shows us the different varieties, including multi-colored flowers, red and black, and white and blue. At times he talks rather robotically, as if he has done this many times and no longer finds it interesting.

Dr. Knapp remarked that people in the US don't know where these flowers come from; they take off all the packaging and identifiers. We didn't interact much with the workers except when our guide had us watch one young guy pack the roses in bunches and staple a cardboard box around them. Otherwise, he focused on us and showing all the different varieties bunched in the back of the room.



Figure 10. La Compañía showroom

Then we returned to the *hacienda*, where I saw a worker putting a huge bouquet of fresh roses in the doorway. We met our guide at the water fountain, which was full of fresh rose petals. I found it quite over the top, like a romantic movie. He talked about the family, how the house was built in the early 1900s, how they live in Quito but they come on the weekends and receive important visitors. He said they tried to keep the house in the same condition it was initially built.

We are then served *bizcochos*, *queso de hoja* and fruit juice by a woman in an embroidered shirt.

Then our guide gave us a tour of the house, which was a classic, European-style house with huge bouquets of fresh roses everywhere, an old piano, fireplace, old phones, irons. The original wallpaper apparently hung on the walls. Old pottery he said they found when they built the house. Very grandiose. Then we moved on to the chapel, where they host all the family's weddings, including his. There were some stones leading up to the chapel with a circular design apparently used to press cheese originally.

Then we went to the showroom, where they had set up more fresh roses of various colors, spread along old farming implements, photos of the family with their prize cows when they used to be dairy farmers (Holstein and Jersey) and photos of the family with various Ecuadorian presidents and important people. We were shown a banner for their website where you can order the flower direct from the US, which apparently takes 5-7 days to arrive, door-to-door. He said we would get a discount for purchasing their flowers in the future because we had made a visit. This was our first and only sales pitch during the day. The woman reappeared and gave us each a long-stemmed pink rose. I felt like I was on *The Bachelor*.

## *La Victoria*

Next, we moved on to *Hacienda La Victoria*, a much smaller enterprise of 5 hectares much higher up in the mountains along a cobble-stone road that took a long time to climb. This plantation started about 12 years ago growing for the domestic market, starting with *botones*, small button roses. They also make the *rosa eterna*, which is dehydrated and lasts a long time, now popular. We wait outside the gate for a long time before a man comes over and opens it up. Then a woman comes, who is introduced as the *ingeniera*. She asks what we want to see first, so it seems like she is new to showing guest around, not rehearsed like the other guy. We later learn that they have just recently started having visitors, maybe 3 years ago.



Figure 11. La Victoria entrance

She first walks us down the lane along plastic-covered greenhouses to the first block, where she shows us several flowers, including the spray, which is for the American market, smaller roses, the *botones*, and others. She talks about production of these roses, says again the same or similar specifications that each foreign client wants as our last host, and the difference between the national roses and the roses for export, which are of higher quality. I ask about the gender makeup of workers, and she says majority women, about 80%. She says they are delicate with the roses,



Figure 12. Botones flowers

more responsible. We visit a few more blocks to see the different varieties. I believe they have 13 varieties they grow. They just started going into the export business, perhaps 5 years ago, to US and Russia mostly. She shows us some grafting going on with stems, and we see some workers grafting in one row. They all have darker skin than she does, a mix of men and women. We walk up to see the post-harvest room, which is quite small. They want to expand this room in the future, she says, to have more space to work. Outside is a cart full of chopped up roses, which she says they compost and reuse. She briefly shows us the room, which is pretty basic, no conveyor belt, with small work stations. We briefly visit the cold room, where there are storage racks and boxes with their name on them. She says the team will be back from lunch in 20 minutes.

We go to the office to wait, where they serve us water and *bizcochos*, more *queso de hoja*. I see one lighter-skinned woman working in the office at the computer. Other than her, there is no one else working. We sit and talk about how they have just recently started receiving visitors, mostly clients like Japanese. We are apparently the first Americans to visit. We talk briefly about President Trump, as the woman is worried what he will do about trade with Ecuador in the future. Then we go outside the gates to see the “sea of plastic” from the greenhouses that

covers the landscape. She says that an advantage of their plantation is that they are surrounded by nature, compared to other plantations in the area.

Then we go back to the post-harvest room to watch the workers process flowers. I spot a small room with cubbies for the workers to store their stuff and change. There is a bus which they likely use to transport their workers to the plantation. In the post-harvest room, we see mostly women and a few men at work. One measures the roses and cuts the stems to the desired lengths, sorting them by length and quality. Another packs the roses in bunches of 25 and staples cardboard around them. Another worker takes these bunches and uses a rotating saw blade to cut the stems to the same lengths. Then they are packed in plastic and placed in the cold room.

A man packs three bouquets of classic red roses, and our guide hands them to each of us. I feel strange taking these roses, having never received anything so extravagant before, but I feel like it's rude to refuse them. Our guide jokes that he has never received flowers before, especially from a woman! We don't interact much with the workers except to watch them perform each of the tasks. Because the plantation is smaller, however, about 50 workers in total, it feels more intimate, like the management knows the floor workers well. Finally, she bids us farewell.

As we drive out, I spot workers playing soccer on a field during their lunch break. During the visit I remember her also saying that another unique part of the farm is that they use mules to carry the flowers around the plantation. As we pass

the workers resting on the field below mules eating grass on a hill, she says that they have their good workers, pointing to the mules, and then they have workers, pointing to the people, as a joke. Both the guide and the woman in the office appear to have lighter skin than most of the workers, who are darker-skinned.

### ***Bellasuni***

Finally, we head to our last stop, *Bellasuni*, which is quite hidden from the main road in Tabacundo. We go down the wrong road, backtrack, and then finally make it down the right road. The guide and I talk about how there isn't signage, that the plantations can be pretty hard to find. A sign at the office says "Bella Roses", which turns out to be the original name of the company, but then another company apparently had the same name first, and the ministry of property rights went after them, so they changed their name to the current one. We see a sports car parked outside the office and some young people near a horse.



The owner of the farm meets us to show us around. He has been in the flower business since 1995 with another *socio* who turned out to be worth nothing, so he started this plantation in 2006. This plantation is 5.5 hectares with 50 workers. I ask about gender composition, and he says it's about equal. Their main market is Russia, some US and



Figure 13. Chemical mask scarecrow

some domestic. Things are difficult because of the Russian crisis, but he hopes they improve soon. The first half of the year is generally the high season, and they fill in the rest with cultivation for the national market. We see a few workers watering the plants and raking the rows, which need to be pristine at the end of work day. Our guide finds out that they work until 3pm five days a week and then again on Saturday for 4 hours because of the needs of production.



Figure 14. Post-harvest room

That is, if they work too many hours in one day, the flowers open up too much, which is not desired. So, the schedule of work is set by the needs of production to keep the flowers to the utmost quality. We again visit some greenhouse to view different varieties and talk about the demands of the market, what's in fashion, what each country wants.

Fashion changes every one to two years, so they

have to change what they are growing frequently. I note a fumigation suit that is strung up on a rope above the bushes, which I correctly identify as a scarecrow. He said that an *indigena* figured out some way to keep the birds away. They have problems with pests when I ask about it and he says they have to fumigate 3 times a week. They fumigate rotating blocks, while the workers are still working during the day. He says it's "absurd" that the government demands that they use chemicals classified as "*sello verde*" and get fined if they don't, when farmers in the area growing potatoes and other foods buy chemicals marked "*sello rojo*", which are more hazardous. He is the only guide today who has talked about chemicals and fumigation. We visit various greenhouses to view all the varieties. He shows us some bushes that are the oldest he has, 12-14 years old. But they aren't really in fashion anymore, so they are hard to sell. But they can live as long as 20 years he claims. They have to rip out the entire bush and start over from zero when they start a new, more fashionable variety. He shows us the post-harvest room, which is larger than the last place. We see workers processing the flowers, similar steps to the last place. There is a row of sticker tags with the names of different varieties such as Tiffany, Esperanzas, Freedom, etc. He shows us two different size boxes, the standard one used to pack the roses and a larger one they have to have made to fit the longer stems demanded by the Russians.

The owner said that they didn't treat their workers poorly, that instead of castigating them, they would use a flag system with different colors to indicate how

they were doing with the quality of their work. If there was a green flag, it meant they were working well, to continue what they were doing. If it was yellow, it meant they need to improve their work. If it was red, he joked that they shouldn't come back. I thought this was a unique and interesting way to communicate the quality of the work. Of course, it only speaks to the work on a collective basis, not individual workers. I wonder if workers self-regulate?

I spot the worker's cubby room, which is in pretty poor condition. We make our way to the reservoir, which is his own for the plantation. It comes from the *Nevado de Cayambe*, which isn't enough to water the plantation entirely, because there are so many in the area. So, he also drilled a well to complete his watering needs. It's a 7-meter deep reservoir. We finally head back to the parking lot, where our guide comments on the race car. The owner loves them, collects them, has 4 and had one starting in high school, which he drove to school. He pointed out that even his high school teachers didn't have nice cars like him. He says his son is 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation for drag racing in that car. He is lighter-skinned than most of the workers we see and clearly comes from money and privilege. I think we are one of his first tourist visitors.

In general, Dr. Knapp pointed out and I observed that the plantation setup and stages were very similar throughout, with the main difference being the scale of operation. It was clear how much the global market and foreign interests dictate and affect the industry; what they demand is what they get, what the plantations grow.

If there is a crisis in another country, it directly affects the industry and their profits. The economics of the industry are constantly precarious, and our guide says they have to think in the short-term, one to two years at a time depending on what is in fashion. Other countries are getting into the game, meaning more supply than demand. The seasonality is also stunning, how the first half of the year they are working at 2 to 3 times their normal pace to keep up for major holidays, then the second half of the year is really low production. What this means for labor is that flower work can be precarious. While many workers are employed full-time, year-round, others are brought on as temporary workers during peak seasons, resulting in a portion of workers in 'precarious' labor conditions. In the Cotopaxi region, which also has some flower production, Martínez Valle (2013) found that about one third of flower workers worked under temporary status that qualified as under his definition of 'precarious labor'. This portion may be higher in the Cayambe region.

### **Observations on Power, Race, Class, Age, and Gender**

While most of what the guides discussed had to do with flower production and the market, I tried to read between the lines to observe and ask about the experience of working on these plantations. First, I noticed class and racial differences at each plantation, that is, generally, the people in power were lighter-skinned and of higher class and privilege. This was true of the owners and managers who walked us around, along with the woman working in the office at *La Victoria*.

By contrast, the flower workers themselves were darker skinned and majority women. While I did not ask people's identities, it is likely that some of these workers were indigenous peoples of Ecuador or of other countries.

I found further evidence of these dynamics while viewing marketing materials for flower businesses, including a promotional video by company *Rosaprima*. Figure 15 shows stills taken as screenshots of various workers on their plantation. The top two images show workers at the front desk and in the company office. They are lighter-skinned and a mix of male and female workers, although, notably, the secretary is a woman. The bottom two photos depict two female workers in the post-harvest room and greenhouse. They have darker skin and perform manual labor with their hands, whereas the office workers work on computers, which likely require a higher skillset and education (and by extension, class) in order to operate. A more in-depth visual discourse analysis of these and other images takes place in Chapter 5, but it is important to note that the company itself, in its promotional materials, reveals gendered, raced and, one could argue, classed hierarchy among their flower workers.



Figure 15. Screenshots taken from *Rosaprima* promotional video, taken July 9, 2017

Second, I felt strong power dynamics at play. During the tour, our guide did not interact with workers we came upon, except to point out tasks they were carrying out like bunching roses into bouquets, as if in a museum with props. There was a clear sense of separation between us, the visitors, with the guide and the workers going about their work. Many stared at us as we passed by, which I completely understand. Mirroring my surprise to find tours to flower plantations, the people we passed seemed surprised by our presence in this work setting. They are not quite industrial factories, but neither are flower plantations spaces that come to mind when one thinks of tourists and where they want to visit. Additionally, I recognized the sense of privilege that comes with touring these kinds of spaces, be it for curiosity, enjoyment or knowledge, especially as white researchers.

Third, gender and power dynamics appeared during these visits as well. I attempted to insert questions about the gender makeup of workers in various stages of the work and why there were women working on one task versus another. Invariably, there were a lot of women working in post-harvest classifying and preparing flowers for transport. The guides repeated variations of discourse that women were somehow “suitable” for this kind of work, often referring to the dexterity of their hands for detailed tasks.

Finally, in terms of age dynamics, I observed mostly young people working in the greenhouses and post-harvest rooms, with fewer middle-aged and older workers. If I did see any, they were tending flower beds in the greenhouse or the managers and supervisors delegating tasks to other workers. This observation exemplifies newer rules among flower plantations that impose an upper age limit of workers to 35 years for women, slightly older for men (Peña Herrera, personal communication, June 27, 2017). One informant said that she had to stay at her current flower plantation because it was the only one that would employ her at her older age. Other informants spoke about how during their interviews for positions, the hiring managers were most interested that they were young and single, with limited to no plans to get married or to have children. These dynamics speak to the desire of export industries such as cut-flowers to employ a workforce that is young, has energy for the high labor demands, and is not distracted or compromised by partner or family obligations at home (Freeman, 1998; Sassen-Koob, 1984).

## Continuing the Hacienda Tradition

Based on observations from these visits and my research, I argue that many flower businesses and plantations follow in Ecuador's colonial tradition of *haciendas* in their structure and function. *Haciendas* traditionally exploited local, often indigenous labor to carry out agricultural production with great disparity between the wealthy owners and the poor workers (Lyons, 2006; Radcliffe, 2015). Of course, working conditions have improved from the days of *haciendas*, which were based on low to no wage serf labor with few days of rest and abundant use of violence and show of force to force local peoples to work for owners (Lyons, 2006). Nonetheless, today, the majority of flower workers receive at or slightly above the state-mandated minimum wage, many work on Saturdays in addition to the five weekdays, and they are *slowly* gaining other work benefits, such as over-time pay, healthcare, and childcare. There are few flower labor unions, meaning that aside from support from labor lawyers, they do not have much say in their working conditions.

One informant who is old enough to have lived through the transition from *haciendas* to flower plantations made this parallel in his narrative. He began working early in his life at age 15 on the local *hacienda* tending cattle with his father. He described the work as long and hard with few breaks and little pay, more like "slavery", in his terms. He entered the flower plantations when he was about 40 years old, when they first started to appear in the region. He described the work in negative terms similar to working on the *hacienda*: "[E]s muy esclavizado, es muy



*duro el trabajo exigido...no había ni como atrasar, cinco minutos que se atrasaba tenía que trabajar de una o dos horas gratis/It's [like] slavery, the work is very hard and demanding...one could not take one's time, 5 minutes delay and one had to work 1 or 2 hours extra."* Although the informant was paid for his work and not held against his will to work on the flower plantations, he did feel like the work was similar to the indentured labor of *haciendas*, especially in the beginning when working conditions were worse and benefits were fewer. The difference between working on the *hacienda* and working on the flower plantation was that although he was paid a bigger wage, flower work was harder and fast, with more pressure to perform and fulfill quotas efficiently.

These findings are consistent with Radcliffe's analysis that Ecuador has, in many ways, maintained rather than cast off the colonial legacies of the power structures of *haciendas*. Radcliffe's (2015) work *Dilemmas of Difference* helps to extend this analysis through its exploration of the concept of 'hierarchies of difference', which she explains: "[A]ris[es] in the aftermath of colonialism when dominant understandings of race, masculinities and femininities, and imaginative geographies of rural and urban areas, were established under power relations that favored the whiter, the urban, the masculine, and the wealthier over others" (4). She goes on to call for "[r]ethinking domination in multiplicity" (4), which is highly relevant for framing and analyzing the geographies of the flower plantation. The same space, a flower plantation, is experienced very differently depending on the

positionality of an individual, not just through markers of ‘social difference’ described here, but also by the individual’s assigned role in the company, which is generally *determined* by such markers. This type of analysis must therefore be intersectional, looking at the crossover of power dynamics created through gender, race, class, age and more; for example, looking at racial power extends such analysis (Faria & Mollett, 2014). The result, as we find in the cut-flower industry, is that this type of labor arrangement organizes and reinforces predominantly darker, female workers doing the lowest-paying manual labor at the bottom of the hierarchy, while those with more privilege, generally whiter, male counterparts, work in the positions of higher authority, with little room to challenge this hierarchy (Ibid).

There are, of course, exceptions, such as female supervisors I interviewed who were able to get promoted to positions of more power, and more men are joining women in the post-harvest room to process flowers. But in general, we see this dynamic playing out in the industry to this day. Additionally, her ideas help to explain the extension of colonial *hacienda* patterns or structures of power in modern flower plantations, run by favored actors who tend to be whiter, wealthier males



Figure 16. Screenshot from *La Compañía's (Rosadex)* website, taken July 10, 2017

who live in urban spaces as well as the rural spaces where flowers are produced. These power dynamics have not changed through time, due to uneven development in Ecuador, resulting in a continuation of these structures in the present, which we see embodied in flower plantations like *La Compañía (Rosadex)*.

The parallels are more obvious among flower plantations that physically converted from *haciendas*, such as *La Compañía*, which started out as a dairy farm owned by the Jarrín family, which has since transitioned its business to producing cut-flowers for export. In fact, the company uses the colonial roots of the place as a selling point to its visitors and customers, as evidenced by the above screenshot from its website (Figure 16). The physical space remains the same, except for the construction of greenhouses and buildings to house the offices and post-harvest production. Instead of raising cattle and producing dairy products and meat, the

company now produces flowers like roses in the greenhouses. This conversion is especially the case for larger properties owned by one family or wealthy owner.

The parallels are subtler for small to medium-scale plantations that are smaller in size and may have started business more recently. *La Victoria* and *Bellasuni* are examples of plantations that fit this category. While these plantations may not be remnants of previous *haciendas*, the fact remains that people, often local, indigenous people, are working this land in agricultural production. They must produce for the owners of the land, with limited alternative options for employment in the area, and they have limited voice in the work conditions. These dynamics follow colonial structures in which lighter, wealthier, predominantly male owners and supervisors manage darker, poorer, predominantly female workers.

### **‘Race to the Bottom’**

While I argue that much of the labor structure and conditions in flower plantations echo those of previous *haciendas*, I also argue that they take on new qualities due to contemporary dynamics of global export and industrial labor. While *haciendas* of the past were power domains, their influence was arguably limited to the regional or national scale. Today, we live in a world that is globalized, with international exchange of goods and services. In some ways, these new dynamics have meant better working conditions, including labor unions, industry organizations, national labor laws, and international standards. In other ways, these

dynamics have resulted in waged work that is precarious and pressured to perform more and faster, often for less pay (Freeman, 1998; Korovkin & Sanmiguel-valderrama, 2007; Sassen-Koob, 1984). I observed such dynamics at play during a visit to another plantation. Immediately, I noticed a state-of-the-art rose sorting machine, complete with conveyor belts and cameras calibrated to measure and sort the rose buds for desired size and quality based on client demand. My contact claims that this machine can process up to 8,000 roses per hour! However, for quality purposes, they reduce the pace to 6,000 roses per hour. Immediately, I wondered what the implications of the new machine were for the flower workers. I asked my contact if this technology means fewer people are needed to complete the work, and they said not really, because they still need people to really check the flowers for quality control. I was told this is still a task that only the human eye can do well. This machine is one of many innovations I observed during the visit, including a computer that prints a sticker label and unique code for each bundle of flowers processed. My contact explained that cut-flowers represent a competitive industry, so they have to be innovative to stay one step ahead of competitors.

Overall, I was very impressed with the innovations of the plantation; it was incredible to observe. However, I was worried about what this means for future employment in the industry, one of the few positives for people here. Dr. Knapp said that by nature of the process, people cannot become obsolete, but certain aspects of the process can become more mechanized. One could argue that this step is

‘inevitable’ because innovation leads to modernizing and simplifying and speeding up the process. From my research, it seems likely that this process will further be mechanized, leading to questions about the sustainability of labor in the industry as owners try to cut costs. This process is known as the economic ‘race to the bottom’, where companies, in an effort to stay competitive among similar companies, cut costs and slash their prices as much as they can. Because labor costs are high in the cut-flower industry, especially compared to other agricultural industries, companies have an incentive to mechanize tasks and reduce the number of workers they need to pay wages or else pressure their workers to be more productive (Korovkin & Sanmiguel-Valderrama, 2007). Nonetheless, these companies must balance this ‘race to the bottom’ with the need to maintain quality in their products, especially for international clients who have high and very specific demands for what their flowers should look like. Therefore, they cannot mechanize to the extent that they sacrifice product quality for lower labor costs, although my visit shows that flower plantations are certainly testing the limits of this balance, as they attempt to remain globally competitive with countries cutting their own production costs. This careful balance is the ‘saving grace’ for people working in the cut-flower industry who rely on the work for a steady wage to support themselves and their families. However, it points to a reduction of flower workers into desirable body parts needed to do cut-flower work (Schurr, 2016). Specifically, workers’ eyes are deemed better at

observing and classifying flowers than cameras and workers' hands and arms are better at sorting, cutting and handling these flowers than robotic machines.

## CONCLUSIONS

While much of the literature on the cut-flower industry has provided analysis with a neoliberal, economic or critical perspective, I maintain that a post-colonial lens must be added to understand the power dynamics and historical legacies of modern-day cut-flower production, consistent with Radcliffe's (2015) discussion and analysis. This perspective reveals that flower workers have very different experiences in the same space of the flower plantation, depending on their positionality within the 'hierarchies of difference' and power dynamics in terms of the role they play with the plantation. Additionally, while the cut-flower industry exhibits the newer characteristics of the international export and industrial production that create downward pressure on labor through a 'race to the bottom', the industry also maintains certain power dynamics and structures from the era of *haciendas*, in many cases carrying forward these legacies today. The findings indicate that working conditions are not as positive as some of the literature makes them out to, pointing to a need to critically evaluate flower labor and pressure for better labor laws and reforms in Ecuador. Such discussion will again be taken up in the concluding chapter.



## CHAPTER 4: Case Study: Experiences of Women in Vicundo

*“Sí, [es] duro, pero económicamente eso me ha servido para por lo menos tener donde vivir y la educación de mis hijos mismos, a veces los hijos no han aprovechado, pero uno aprovecho, pero uno al menos aprovecho y me siento contenta... entonces yo si pienso quedarme ahí para mi vejez. Quedarme un tiempito o por lo menos unos 5 años mínimo y los otros 5 años y si diosito me da vida seguir aportando hasta eso pienso hacer algo aquí...jubilarme.”*

- Miriam, on work in flowers and looking to the future

*“I was really struck by how she worked tirelessly to find ways to make money and always leaving time to cultivate, so that she had the security of always having food to eat, even if there was no money to buy food. She is so strong, always moving, always working, leading her cow. Even though it seems she wasn't treated well as a child, she takes such good care of her children and grandchildren, making sure they are fed and well-taken-care-of. She is selfless, waking up early to make sure her children eat well before going to school, making a lot of sacrifices for them. Men have not treated her well, but she has stood up to them to do what she wants or needs. She is always looking for a new opportunity.”*

- Excerpt from fieldnotes on Miriam, July 8, 2017

This chapter focuses on the case study of women in the community of Vicundo who are currently working or have worked on nearby flower plantations. It seeks to highlight the narratives and experience of several informants who shared their stories, what Buttimer calls their ‘lifeworld’ (1976). Through storytelling and discussion of key themes and patterns found, I show the varied experience of these women and how work in the cut-flower industry affects and shapes their lives and



their community. I also seek to depict these women as active agents, rather than passive laborers or victims (Pratt, 2004). Instead of being simply flower workers, they are people who work on flower plantations; they lead rich lives full of creative activity with hope for the future.

The chapter argues that women in Vicundo navigate this work according to the conditions they face, from the leadership opportunities of work in administration to the manual labor of direct work with flowers. Work in cut-flowers offers employment, skills-building and a source of income that is positive for many women workers, providing them with new opportunities to save for land, livestock and house-building materials. However, in many cases this work comes with much sacrifice, as women must spend time away from their children and frequently face chronic health problems, bringing into question empowerment discourse.

Overall, I found that women (and men) in the community of Vicundo have been able to carve out lives for themselves from flower plantation work, in many cases as leaders of their own households. Today, they seek alternative sources of income through entrepreneurial activities and the promotion of community tourism and practice of tradition to supplement or replace work in flowers, a counternarrative to flower plantation work. Nonetheless, members of Vicundo cannot completely escape flower plantations, as their community is physically surrounded by plantations that continue to affect their families and daily lives.

First, I highlight the lives and experiences of five women and two men who served as informants and over time became friends and acquaintances during my fieldwork. Next, I explore common themes and patterns that emerged from these shared narratives, including themes I did not expect to find like migration and entrepreneurship. Third, I discuss the strategic solutions employed by these women and men to navigate work in the flower plantations to support their own goals. I finish with discussion of one of these strategic solutions: the development of a community tourism project to support their community financially and socially. This strategic solution represents a counternarrative and a potential alternative to flower plantation work in a region dominated in all aspects by this industry, with tentative benefits and potential pitfalls.

#### **NARRATIVES OF WOMEN IN VICUNDO**

The following section includes the narratives of five women – Miriam, Johana, Paola, Sandra and Diana – and two men – Luis and Carlos – from Vicundo, whom I interviewed during fieldwork (names changed to protect identity). All of these residents have worked in flower plantations in the past or continue to work on them today. Some of the interviews I recorded and transcribed and others I was only able to listen and to write notes. I paraphrase their stories here, but I make all attempts to keep true to their sentiments and to include direct quotes to let their voices shine. I share their stories here and leave discussion for the end of the section.

## **Miriam**

Miriam came from a family that worked on the *Hacienda Guachalá*, where her mother milked cows for over 30 years. She described her parents favoring her brother over her, giving him money to go to school and leaving her to walk to school because she could not afford transport. When she turned 13, she stopped going to school and started working at a *papelería* (stationary store). She said the other option was to become a domestic worker in the city, but one needed to know how to sew and knit, and she did not know how.

Miriam later began her career in the cut-flower industry when she was 17. She described the intensity of the work, starting at 6 or 7am to harvest the flowers, removing thorns, bad leaves and other undesired parts of the plant, then cutting the flowers with scissors and bringing them to the cold post-harvest room for the next steps in production. She also cleaned the beds and watered the plants. She had to work fast to meet the daily quotas of the managers, which consisted of managing a specific number of rows. As she explained, “*No se puede trabajar como tortuga, muy rápido*”/One can’t work like a [slow] turtle, [instead] very fast”.

After she met her husband, she left work on the plantation to live in Cayambe, returning to work a few years later after the couple took out a loan to construct a house in Vicundo and she needed to help pay back the loan. All her salary after paying necessities, including her holiday bonus, went toward the loan and paying for construction materials. It was “*mucho sacrificio*”/much sacrifice”,

often working until 1am on building the house when she got off work, and she said it was a huge relief when they finally paid off the loan.

Whatever extra money she made was saved or used for her family. When her children were born, wages went toward paying for their education. She also got creative figuring out ways to make extra income, including working in a kitchen making food for workers, such as bread, eggs, milk, and ice cream made from milk and fruit, which helped to buy food. Sometimes she would leave to take care of her children, returning to plantation work when she could afford to pay a young woman to be a childcare provider. She described the push and pull struggle of working versus staying home to care for her children, saying that the work was good money for her family, so “*me arrepentí salir del trabajo*/I regretted leaving the work”. However, sometimes she would have to leave her children home alone to work.

Today, she leaves work around 5pm and comes home to care for her family and to work on her land when “*me doy modos hacer*/she has the energy to work”. She described the various crops she grows, including broccoli, cauliflower, beans, and corn, as well as animals like a cow, goat, rabbits, chickens and guinea pigs. She explained that “*cuando no tengo dinero, tengo animals*/when I don’t have money, [at least] I have animals [to help me get by]”.

Miriam has worked on flower plantations for over 20 years, coming and going as events in her personal life gave her the space to work. She described changes in cut-flower labor over time since she started. Originally, the work was done

manually. For example, workers originally did not get gloves, so when there were bees on the flowers, she would get stung. However, now there are machines and work gear to make the work easier.

At one point the flower plantations started to require their workers to be 35 years old or under. Miriam was 40 years at the time, so she was ineligible to work at most plantations in the area. She went to work for her current company because they did not impose an age limit, and even women 50 years old could work.

She described the owner as having a “*buen corazón*/good heart”, giving the workers uniforms, gloves, food, paid transport, and healthcare. When she started to feel pain in her back, hands and eye, he arranged for her to see a specialist, gave her time off to recover, and then modified her work activities so she was not doing repetitive motions like cutting with her hands that aggravated her diagnosed carpal tunnel syndrome. She stays at the plantation because she does not have other options, the management supports her, and her husband is in Spain now and not supporting her financially. So, she continues working.

### ***Johana***

Johana started working on a flower plantation in Cayambe when she was 16 years old. She lived up in the mountains at that time, rising before dawn to start walking down to the valley to get to work. She worked in the postharvest section, classifying roses and other flowers based on the demands of different clients. For

example, she said that Russian clients asked for long-stemmed roses of high quality with large buds. Johana described how cold the postharvest room was, especially in the morning. She tried to learn how to make *embonches* (bunches) of roses, but it was difficult to learn and takes a lot of practice. She could not quite get the process right. Johana said it was “*trabajo duro*/hard work”.

At the time, she was young and single. Men and women worked together in the same space, which means that they interacted frequently. When she talked to male workers on the plantation, other women were jealous, even if they were older and married. She said that it was common for workers to have partners on the plantation as well as at home.

In general, she described work on the flower plantation as “good work”. It was the only plantation she worked at, but she heard it had some of the best working conditions. For example, she thought that the plantation was one of the first to have a childcare center on the property for workers’ children. Johana described the work as harder now because there are fewer workers doing more work in the same amount of time for virtually the same pay.

Johana left the plantation because she needed to take time off from work to take her final exams in high school. Her boss told her to decide between leaving to take her exams or staying and having a job. She thought that taking her exams were more important, so she left to finish her studies. She started taking English classes, where she met Carlos, whom she eventually married and had her sons. Johana is

now completing a degree in English Education at a Quito university. Her goal is to get a Master's and to be an English teacher.

### **Paola**

Paola was 17 years old when she started working at a flower plantation, entering the work because her parents did not have much money to support her and her siblings. She started in the greenhouse pulling weeds because she did not yet have experience in the field. Paola described the work as easy because they did not have to hurry in their tasks at that time, at least compared to today when “*hay demasiada explotación de las personas*/there is too much exploitation of the people”. However, the work was still tiring, starting at 6:30am and ending at 4pm, especially due to the heat in the greenhouses under the sun. Workers were given an oat drink and a sandwich at 10am and a lunch of soup, stew and juice at noon, yet she described still feeling hungry in the afternoon.

After 3 months of training on this plantation, she moved to another plantation, and in only 3 months worked her way up to the role of supervisor. She still had a lot to learn on the job, for example, knowledge of 8 different kinds of flowers instead of 3 at the previous plantation. As an 18-year-old supervising people, she ran into challenges: “*Claro para mí era difícil ordenar a personas maduras más mayores que yo...porque no me querían obedecer...había un ingeniero...era mi respaldo...él me veía con mucha...responsabilidad que podía yo asumir ese cargo*/Yes,

for me it was difficult to order people who were older, more mature than me...because they didn't want to obey me...there was an engineer...he was my [support]...he saw me with a lot of...responsibility, that I could take on this load". Eventually, the mostly female team got accustomed to following the orders of their young supervisor. She worked in this role for a year and a half before leaving the plantation when she gave birth to her son. From that point forward, she went in and out of work on 3 more plantations, eventually moving to the post-harvest area where she served as the supervisor for workers who classified, bunched and packed flowers in the cold room. As she describes: "*[P]ara mí era bastante duro, porque igual era necesario adquirir conocimiento, porque el ingeniero decía, Paola si usted es capaz, usted ya sabe manejar a la gente en el campo, porque no puede manejar acá/For me it was pretty hard, because again it was necessary to gain knowledge, because the engineer would say, Paola if you are capable, you already know how to manage people in the [greenhouses], why don't you manage here [in the post-harvest room]*".

Paola went on to explain that the work in the post-harvest room has gotten more difficult over time as the international clients have gotten more demanding about specific details in the flowers' appearance. The workers had to work as fast as they could to meet quotas by the hour, as well as specific standards in terms of the quality of the flowers: "*[T]eníamos que programarnos y tratar de cumplir esa metas, igual en la post cosecha si llegaba la flor tratar a lo máximo, lo mínimo desechar y lo*



*máximo teníamos que estar exportando todo lo bueno*/We had to program ourselves and try to fulfill these goals, equally in the post-harvest area if a flower arrived to treat it to the maximum, throw away the least possible and we had to maximize the good flowers we were exporting”. During the high seasons (like Valentíne’s Day), the workers were pressed even further, forced to work until as late as 3am, sometimes even sleeping at the flower plantation when there was not time to return home to sleep. Nonetheless, her work as a supervisor paid well, quite a bit in her opinion. Because of the good pay and a bank loan, she was able to pay for materials to construct her house over the course of 3.5 years, working slowly and learning how to build.

Paola left work at the flower plantations in 2001. She started working in a nearby mine, collecting rock powder, delivering diesel and, because she was curious, learning how to operate heavy machinery. Paola was the only woman on her team doing this type of work. Interestingly, the rocks harvested went to the flower industry, which used them in the flower-growing beds to maintain soil texture and humidity. She mentioned that this work is dangerous and that not much of the rock exists in the mines today, due to increased demand from the local flower plantations. In this way, she maintained contact with flower plantations, delivering the rocks to the plantations, making bills, and taking payments. To this day, she continues to work in this industry, managing her own rock extraction team. She continues to work on her house, building a patio addition on the front, where she

hopes to make a café or a store to sell food to tourists who come to Vicundo to visit their attractions.

### **Sandra**

Sandra was also young when she started working at a flower plantation, about 20 years ago when her son was 6 years old. She started working there to earn some money and “*avanzar a hacer algo porque yo, mi deseos eran de comprarme un terreno por mis hijos/to advance doing something because I, my dreams were to buy myself land for my children*”. Like Miriam, she started working in the greenhouse cutting roses, starting the harvest at 7:30 and finishing by 10am. She described being responsible for cutting between 30-40 flower beds during this time according to very specific standards: “[T]enía que cortar pronto, y un punto que era un solo punto, que no debía cortar ni abierto ni tampoco muy cerrado porque sabían multar así si cosechan mal/I had to cut quickly, quickly, and a point that was one point, I couldn’t cut neither open nor very closed [rose buds] because [the supervisors] knew to fine [the workers] if they harvested poorly”.

After the harvest, she described in detail the rest of the tasks she had for the morning, such as removing shoots, leaves and spines from the roses and cleaning the rows between the flower beds, as fast as she could: “[T]enía que hacer rapidito, caminando más pronto/I had to do [everything] very fast, walking as fast as possible”. Sandra said that all this manual labor was very hard. After working as fast as possible

to get these tasks done, the workers had a mid-day break “*a las 12 en punto/at 12 o’clock on the dot*” to eat their lunch and rest. They had to return to their posts at 1pm exactly to begin work again: “*Sí, a la 1 en punto que nos sacaban del almuerzo ya antes de la una ya teníamos que estar vuelta en el trabajo, acababa de comer y corre vuelta a los bloques a seguir trabajando, cuando más entre 5 y 10 minutos tenía que descansar, y cuando estaba atrasado de hacer los trabajos nada de descansar/Yes, at 1 o’clock on the dot, we finished our lunches before 1pm and already we had to return to work, finish eating and run back to the blocks to continue working, [having] between 5 and 10 minutes to rest, and when we were behind in the work, no rest at all*”.

Only if she had a good supervisor, someone who was from the area, would she occasionally be allowed to have 5 minutes of rest and a snack. The afternoon was filled with more tasks, such as irrigating and watering the flower beds, fix up the pathways between beds, raking, and removing any trash so the area was clean. Sandra described how the supervisors, “*andaban vigilando si están trabajando o no, de repente nos encontraba que estábamos parados, una multa buena sabia poner/they walked observing if [the workers] were working or not, one moment they would find us if we were stopped, a good fine they knew [to give us]*”. Supervisors also gave fines for activities such as losing tools or talking when they should be working. She had to finish her assigned tasks as fast as possible by 4pm when the workday ended, otherwise, she had to stay until 6pm to finish working because she was not as fast

as her coworkers. Staying until 6pm meant there were no more buses, so she would have to walk home in the dark, which understandably “*me daba miedo/made me afraid*”.

Sandra also described chemical use on the plantation and health problems she started to experience. Despite regulations to control fumigation and protect workers from exposure, Sandra explained a different reality in which fumigators would enter the greenhouse while the workers were still working and spray chemicals from above onto the flowers and their exposed bodies. She compared the risks of this work with that of being a domestic servant: “*es bueno así trabajando de empleada doméstica no está con los químicos nada de eso, pero en las flores hay mucha enfermedad, y estando trabajando en las flores yo me enferme me salieron unas ronchas así en las piernas/it’s good that way working as a domestic worker to not be with chemicals nothing like that, but in the flowers, there is a lot of sickness and working in the flowers I got sick with welts that appeared on my legs*”.

She was sent to get blood tests, and she said the doctors explained that her blood was “contaminated”. Because she did not have a husband or family willing to help her, she continued working on the plantation despite her pain and growing health problems. Eventually, Sandra left the plantation. Despite repeatedly calling the work “ugly”, she said she regretted leaving because with the money, she could have bought another plot of land.

### **Diana**

Diana's account was more diplomatic and fact-based, giving an overview of the flower industry, rather than a lot of details about her own experience. She recently entered the flower plantation business. Diana had just had her first child and had planned to stay home with him for 6 months and then continue her studies, but a friend told her a flower plantation was looking for an extra accountant, so she decided to start working. She worked at a Russian-owned plantation for 7 months, but the work was not "adequate", so she moved on to a flower plantation in Tabacundo, where she works now. Her current position is in the administrative office on a 10-person team, where she manages international clients' payments. The office team is about half and half men and women, including accountants, tax managers, exterior commerce, purchasing, and more.

Diana explained that her position was a lot of work, which had to be done efficiently: *"[L]o que pasa es que hay mucho trabajo, hay muchísimo trabajo, la verdad, nosotros trabajamos desde lo que llegamos, hasta lo que salimos, porque siempre hay bastante información, bastantes cosas que hacer. Yo creo que tenemos el tiempo exacto para hacer cada cosa/[The reality] is there is a lot of work, there is so much work, truly, we work from when we arrive until we leave, because there is always a lot of information, many things to do. I think we have the exact amount of time to do everything"*.

Despite the busy work schedule, Diana said that she was “content” working on the plantation, that “*tengo todos los beneficios, también si sé que en algún rato que yo necesite algún permiso, algún extra...ellos...ayudarme con eso*/I have all the benefits, also I know that if sometime [in the future] I might need permission, something extra, they...[will help] me with that”. She started our interview describing all the benefits the company gives workers, including dental care, drug abuse support, family medicine, and women’s health. Diana also said that the work was “enriching” in the sense that she could develop herself professionally; every day represented an opportunity to learn something new. She pointed out that several coworkers in the office have worked on the plantation for more than 10 years, evidence to her that it is a good workplace, mostly due to her boss.

Nonetheless, the flower industry has significantly changed the working landscape of the region, to the point where people now live in precarious circumstances depending on it as the main source of work and wages: “*Dios mío el día que se cierre una florícola así sea la más pequeña...son 60 familias que se quedan sin trabajo...queda sin comida la mujer los hijos, entonces de que van a vivir?*”/My god the day that a flower plantation closes even the smallest one...60 families are left without work....the wife is left without food [for] the children, how are they going to live then?” The industry is volatile in the face of domestic or international crisis, leaving many without options if something were to cause the plantations to close and families to suddenly be without work or money to pay for necessities. While she

did not state it directly, it is likely Diana feels the pressure of this precarity herself, as she has to provide for her family as well.

### **Men of Vicundo**

While the focus of this project was the experience of women in the flower industry, I had the opportunity to speak with two men in the community who also worked in flowers. I wanted to include their voices as well to start to shed light on the gendered experience of the work, especially through fairly strict division of labor among female and male workers. In addition, their narratives illuminate relationships between the industry and different generations of families, as Luis and Carlos share a father-son relationship and each worked on flower plantations at different points in their careers and in different eras.

### ***Luis***

Luis began working early in his life at age 15 on the local *hacienda* tending cattle with his father. He entered the flower plantations when he was about 40 years old, when they first started to appear in the region. He took on different positions, including phytosanitary care and greenhouse maintenance. Workers on the flower plantations did get some benefits, such as company transport if they lived close by, as well as lunch on the plantation. However, those who lived far away had to go on foot to get to work, and the company would take money out of the workers' paychecks to cover some of the costs of lunch. In the early years, the pay was not

much, barely enough to buy food and other basics. As a result, Luis describes his children suffering because they had nothing, not even enough to pay for all the school fees. Luis worked on various plantations for the next 20 years, and he said that some plantations were better than others, providing better lunch, uniforms and equipment to workers, and paying for more of the lunch versus charging the workers each pay period.

In general, Luis commented on the hard, manual labor required to keep the industry going: “[C]omo dicen en las fincas florícolas la herramienta principal es la mano de obra, las personas, sin la gente igual en una empresa nunca podría funcionar/As they say on the flower farms the main tool is labor, people, without people the enterprise could not function”. Most of the work he did was supervising chemical fumigation, which he described as “very dangerous”, although he did not know much about the nature of the chemicals at the time. This work was restricted to male workers only and represented a significant risk: “[E]ra muy sacrificado por decir así, porque ahí talvez la única ventaja era para sobrevivir no más/It was a big sacrifice to say the least, because perhaps the only advantage was to survive no less”. He mentioned that he experienced significant health problems: “Así por los químicos...tres veces casi me escapo de morir, por intoxicación agua, me empezó afectar la vista, me empezó afectar las vías respiratorias, los intestinos, me empezó como a tener problemas gástricos esos fueron los problemas dando fiebres, temperaturas/Because of the chemicals...3 times I escaped death, by water



intoxication, my [eye]sight started to be affected, my respiratory system started to be affected, my intestines, I started to have gastric problems that gave me fevers, temperatures”

When he turned 60, Luis retired permanently. Now he dedicates himself to the family’s camping project, organizing visitors to stay at the campsite on their property, as well as tending to their vegetable garden. He said that he has heard the working conditions and benefits offered are better now than when he was working on the plantations.

### **Carlos**

Carlos began working on flower plantations about 20 years ago when he was 14 years old. He started working mostly during vacations when he was in high school for 1 or 2 months at a time. Because he did not have a lot of experience, he did simple tasks like cleaning the plants and flower beds. He remembers working in the greenhouses and someone coming up to him and telling him to leave for a moment while they fumigated the area. He was not very educated, he said, so he only waited for a few minutes before returning inside the greenhouse, and he remembers smelling a strong odor. However, he was focused on making money, so he did not take it very seriously at the time. Later on, he started to fumigate as well, without proper protective gear or training: *“[M]e acuerdo que solo decía que caminemos rápido, y una de esas se reventó una manguera y en ese momento , recuerdo muy*

*fácilmente como haber ingerido esos productos, me sentía mal...trate de sacar así, pero fue imposible y esas son como malas experiencia que quedo/I remember only that [the supervisors] told us to walk quickly, and one of the hoses broke and in that moment, I remember very easily what it was to have swallowed those products, I felt bad... I tried to get rid of it, but it was impossible and those are the bad experiences that remain [in my memory]”.*

He describes the flower industry in Ecuador as having advantages and disadvantages. While the flower plantations provide work and a paycheck for many people in the region, allowing people to buy things they could not before, they are also one of the only options for employment. In addition, the plantations have significantly affected peoples’ lives regardless of whether they work in the industry or not, simply by co-habituating: *“[E]stoy un poco preocupado ya que vivo alrededor de muchas plantaciones y en la noche a veces se puede oler algo diferente, no al aire puro sino algo diferente, aparentemente como pesticidas o talvez algo que están utilizando/I am a little worried that I live surrounded by many plantations and at night sometimes one smells something different, not pure air but rather something different, apparently with pesticides or perhaps something that [the flower plantations] are using.”*

What is tricky is the fact that community members are worried about all the flower plantations in the area, yet, they are caught in a bind because the plantations offer them benefits and services in return for their allowing the plantations to

continue expanding, says Carlos. He explains that this increases environmental contamination in the area, which people unfortunately do not understand because they do not have a good education. Instead, he believes people only think about their paycheck and buying what their families need, rather than the cost to the community over time. Overall, Carlos explains: “[Y]o diría que hay un 20% de ventaja para la comunidad y un 80% de desventaja para la comunidad y todas las ganancias realmente son para los dueños y administradores de las empresas/I would say that there is 20 percent advantage for the community and 80 percent disadvantage for the community and all the gains actually are for the enterprise owners and administrators.” These days, he thinks that parents who have worked in flower plantations for much of their lives, even owners, are working to make sure their children do not have to also work there. Carlos’s own father, Luis, worked so that Carlos could get an education and not return to the plantations. Therefore, Carlos went to Ibarra to study English, received a degree in teaching English, then taught children and young adults for 9 years. He even received a scholarship to study English teaching at a university in the United States. Now, as a teacher, “a veces hablo sobre estos temas...mirando el contexto real, menciono a los estudiantes que deben hacer alguna cosa...pero no relacionado con las plantaciones/sometimes I talk about these themes [with my students]...seeing the real context, I mention to students that they should do something...but not related to the plantations.” In this

way, Carlos is trying to shape the minds of future generations of potential flower plantation workers, to make them think more critically about the industry.

### **ROSES IN A ROW: NARRATIVE THEMES AND PATTERNS**

In this section, I discuss themes and patterns that emerged from my interviews and the above narratives. While I wish to let the narratives speak for themselves to some extent, I do see significant themes expressed that are worth discussing. Overall, by sharing these long-form narratives, I strive to show that each individual's experience in the flower industry is unique, despite the tendency of previous literature to homogenize and generalize the experience of flower workers. These experiences differ significantly due to many factors, including age, gender, job type, and the state of the industry when the informant worked in the flower plantations.

#### **Aged Experiences**

Miriam and Sandra are older, facing plantations' new age limits, while Diana and Johana are younger, starting their careers with young children at home. These experiences mirror the international export sector, in which there many women workers who are young, tapering off when women reach their 40s and above (Sassen-Koob 1984). Paola is middle-aged and has carved out a new career for herself in a male-dominated construction industry. Miriam, Sandra and Luis started in the

flower industry when it was in its infancy and have witnessed poorer working conditions that have improved over time (Knapp 2017).

### **Gendered Labor**

The type of work performed on the plantations depends quite a bit on one's gender. The women interviewed here worked in the office, in the greenhouse, and in the post-harvest areas. By contrast, Luis and Carlos worked on greenhouse maintenance, as well as fumigation, which is a male-specific task in the industry (Knapp, 2017). Luis and Carlos describe chemical exposure in more detail because of their closer proximity to chemicals on the job, although some of the women experienced chemical exposure themselves, especially the older women who worked when safety regulations were laxer. The office is one space where men and women have more opportunities to work together, although there are still gendered hierarchies in terms of position and pay rates.

### **Reproductive Labor**

In addition, the women were more likely to describe having children, taking time off to raise their children, seeking childcare, and working to provide for their families than the men I spoke to. These narratives speak to the reproductive labor women perform in addition to waged labor, which is so often invisibilized by modern, neoliberal society (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006). I found it very interesting that both Miriam and Sandra specifically mentioned experiencing regret for leaving

their work on the flower plantations because it meant a wage to pay for houses, land, and their children's education, even if the work came at great sacrifice in terms of their time spent with their children and their personal health. These narratives speak to ideas about motherhood and the social and cultural expectations that women should care for their children (Silvey, 2006), while now also adding the labor for wages in the flower plantations, a constant push-and-pull that causes significant stress. Miriam broke down in tears at the end of her interview when she explained the terrible dilemma of having to decide between staying at home to raise her children or going into the plantation to make a living to support the family, with her husband out of the picture. She wanted me to know that she was a good mother, that she had never abandoned her kids despite her career of work in flowers.

### **A Spectrum of Opinions**

Despite literature that paints the picture that workers are either victims being exploited (Mena Pozo, 1999) or women being empowered (Newman et al., 2001), these narratives show a broader spectrum of opinions about work in the flower industry, from terrible and nearly slavery to very satisfying and full of professional development opportunities.<sup>9</sup> Sandra and Luis had very negative opinions of the work, Carlos was critical and mostly skeptical of the industry, Miriam and Johana described the many difficulties of the work, while Paola and

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, this is how the work was presented to me, which may not be reality.

Diana had more positive experiences during their careers in flowers. This chapter seeks to show a deeper and more varied narrative of the realities of work in flower plantations, which certainly depend on who you are and your role (and power status) in the industry.<sup>10</sup>

### **Pressure to Perform**

On a related note, the theme of speed and pressure to perform efficiently appeared frequently in these narratives. Sandra, Miriam, Paola and Luis described being observed by supervisors to make sure they were always working and getting their tasks done as fast as possible. If they did not succeed, they faced disciplinary action, such as docked pay and being forced to stay after-hours to complete missed tasks. It appears that pressure to work faster has increased over time as industry leaders have tried to cut labor costs. In this sense, workers on the plantations have become almost mechanized, performing repetitive tasks at faster and faster rates, resulting in all kinds of consequences as they face their physical limits.

### **Risks, Accidents and Health**

While not included in their narratives, Miriam and Diana spoke at length about job-related risks and injuries they have witnessed on the flower plantations where they work. Diana described someone on her plantation who had the misfortune of getting heavy packing materials dropped on his foot. His foot was

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<sup>10</sup> These themes are explored in more depth in the previous chapter

smashed, and he could not walk for a long time. This injury severely affected the worker and his family, who relied on him for their earnings. While Miriam and Diana said that they had not witnessed or heard about a lot of accidents while working on plantations, the few incidents were significant enough to bring up unprompted during the interviews, pointing to some of the traumatic and risky aspects of this labor. It seems that workers who get in accidents do receive some sort of compensation, but obviously the psychological and emotional damage cannot be discounted.

Relatedly, health problems informants faced came up often in the interviews. They described pains and injuries, including problems with eyesight, welts on their skin, issues with their hands and wrists, pain in their digestive and intestinal tracts, and more. Some connected these problems with their direct work with chemical or else exposure due to proximity to fumigation in the greenhouses, stating a direct causation. Others did not make this direct connection, instead seeing the issues as a result of their labor over time. Whether or not one can make a definitive connection between chemical use and these types of bodily hazards, the health traumas these informants have experienced are very real and represent an added layer of difficulties they face on a day-to-day basis in life and work. Such narratives connect to feminist work on the scale of the body, how “women’s bodies are commodified” and devalued, taking on hard labor in often trying conditions, which leave indelible physical marks on their bodies (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006:455).



### **Work Benefits**

Healthcare was naturally discussed as a follow-up, with informants describing how early on there were no doctors on site at the plantations, and they had to work through the pain. Later, doctors, nurses, and even social workers entered the scene, supporting workers with health services to varying degrees. Other informants were “luckier,” given permission to see specialists, take time off work, or to modify their work tasks when they returned. This and other benefits were mentioned as advantages to working in the industry. Overall, it appears that healthcare on plantations has improved over time, with more benefits today.

### **Local Environmental Effects**

Despite following an open-ended interview style, I asked nearly everyone what effects they saw the flower industry having on the local community. Carlos was the most vocal and opinionated on this theme. As described, he saw the industry as having certain advantages and disadvantages, mostly advantages to the owners and administrators who reaped economics benefits and disadvantages to communities and families who worked hard, received low pay, and faced the volatility of the industry, as well as environmental degradation and contamination of local lands and water supplies. Luis also described environmental effects, explaining how the community used to use the river to fish, bathe, and wash. This river passes by several flower plantations in the area. Now there are no fish in the river, and people do not use it for fear of getting sick due to dumping of chemicals and flower industry waste.

Miriam and Diana described how flower plantations changed Cayambe, which grew and urbanized rapidly in response to offering infrastructure and services to flower workers migrating in from other places (Becker & Tuttillo, 2009). Today, Cayambe is nearly unrecognizable to people who knew it a few decades ago as one of the poorest regions in the country (Peña Herrera, personal communication, June 27, 2017). This rapid development has come with many of the trade-offs highlighted.

### **Migration**

While migration was not one of my main focuses for this project, migration issues repeatedly appeared in the narratives of my informants in Vicundo. Due to urban bias and limited job opportunities in rural spaces, many people have emigrated from areas such as Cayambe in the past decades (Jokisch, 2014; Jokisch & Pribilsky, 2002). Luis described the dynamic of people in Ecuador migrating to Spain and other countries at length: “[M]ucha gente ha salido fuera del país shan migrado mucho como a España han ido bastantes a trabajar ahí, y ya no han regresado, continúan trabajando, ahí, dicen prefieren estar trabajando ahí y no volver a luchar aquí en el Ecuador, que acá es un poco más complicado...también hay gente que no ha podido ir, gente bien pobre...quieren salir para ganar bien y solventar los gastos, pero los que han tenido la posibilidad de tener un pasaje así, o alguna palanca así por medio de algún familiar/Many people have left the country, have migrated [to places] like to Spain to work there, and they haven’t returned, they continue working, there,

they say they prefer to be working there and not to return to fight here in Ecuador, that here it is a little more complicated...also there are people that haven't been able to go, very poor people...they want to go to make money and pay off their expenses, but [only] those who have had the possibility to have a [ticket] or some support by means of a relative". This quote illuminates a number of dynamics about migration, such as the desire for economic opportunity as a driver for migrating from Ecuador, the class barriers that prevent many from doing so, and the importance of relatives who can support people who want to migrate, especially if they are already living there (Lawson, 2000). Luis also notes that people migrate and do not return because they find a better life elsewhere where they do not have to "fight" as hard to make a living, to get by.

The cut-flower industry has been seen to stave some this out-migration by providing a viable source of income for many in the area, particularly women. While Miriam described her brother traveling to Quito to work at *Pizza Hut* and other women moving to the city to become domestic workers, she stayed in Vicundo because she was able to get work at a local flower plantation. Work in flower plantations is one of the few employment opportunities in the area that hires (and even targets) women and provides at least the state-mandated minimum wage (Freeman, 1998; Knapp, 2017).

In fact, the trend has reversed, such that many are now migrating to Cayambe to work in cut-flowers, including people from other parts of Ecuador and nearby

countries like Colombia and Venezuela, as well as managers from Quito who commute daily. As Miriam described, the constitution of the flower plantation workers has changed significantly, now a “*mezcla de todos/mix of everyone*”, a phenomenon recognized as the “*raíz de plantaciones/roots of plantations*”. Miriam described people coming from other parts of Ecuador, such as the Amazon and coastal Guayaquil, as well as from other countries, such as Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Chile. The sudden interaction of people from different places and backgrounds leads to new social dynamics, as people learn about different cultural customs and practices, adapt, adopt or resist. Miriam saw this process in a very positive light, the chance for new exchanges and friendships.

Additionally, some women I talked with discussed how their husbands migrated and they ‘stayed behind’. Miriam’s husband moved to Spain to find work, and he has been there ever since. Initially, he sent her money to support her and their children. Eventually, these remittances ended, and Miriam has had to take over financial support of the family. She decided to stay in Vicundo instead of also emigrating to Spain to join her husband. Miriam said, “*Prefiero aquí, mi dinero, mi terreno/I prefer here, my money, my land*”. She noted the current economic crisis in Spain and said she preferred her life in Vicundo working on flower plantations. Due to crises in different countries, Miriam described the work as unstable because it is always changing and responding to these crises. This narrative speaks to the increasingly precarious nature of neoliberal structures in urban and rural spaces

today (McDowell, 1998). Industries like cut-flower production are at the mercy of the global market, with a crisis in one place affecting many others in a ripple effect. In response, people are 'expendable'; they have to adapt, moving around to look for jobs, working for a while, perhaps being laid off or fired, and repeating the process again. Nothing is certain in this type of environment.

### **MAKING ROSEWATER WITH ROSES: STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS**

Despite the challenges and struggles of work in the flower plantations conveyed in these narratives, an unmistakable theme that also came up is how informants navigate this work and create strategic solutions to improve their situation and to remain resilient. They were strategic in: (1) how they used their wages, (2) how they carried out repetitive tasks, (3) how they earned money in addition to their work on plantations, and (4) how they interacted with plantation management.

Unprompted, women spoke about how work in flowers allowed them to earn wages to pay for land, houses, home improvements, animals such as cows and goats, their children's education, as well as community improvements to support their tourism initiative. Without these wages, it is likely they would not be able to afford them, as other jobs like domestic work tend to pay much less. With more financial opportunities, these women are able to more actively shape their lives at home and to provide for their children. This is also in the face of the fact that most of these

women are single and therefore the main or in some cases only wage-earners if they do not have help from relatives or older children who also work. For instance, Miriam's husband now lives in Spain, and he used to send her remittances, but he no longer does; she must support herself and all her children, one who still goes to school. Despite this lack of support, she is saving up to buy more livestock and materials to build another house for her daughter.

Miriam talked about carrying out her repetitive work tasks with purpose to protect her body and health. Much of her work consists of cutting roses off their bushes with scissors. Typically, this work is done with one's dominant hand, over and over throughout one's shift, which can often lead to injuries like carpal tunnel. Instead, Miriam makes a concerted effort to work ambidextrous, switching work between her right and left hand. She also switches which side she uses to sweep the paths between the flower beds so she does not favor one side of her back over the other. Despite the fact that she has been diagnosed with carpal tunnel in her hand, she attributes these actions, plus rest, to preventing a worsening condition.

Relatedly, Miriam and Sandra both mentioned working with management to improve their situations. Miriam talked with the owner of the plantation where she works to get a specialist to look at her hand, get time off work to let her hand rest, and she got the owner to get her role switched so that she no longer had to cut roses with scissors when she returned. Sandra discussed needing time off work to take advantage of an offer by an NGO to build houses for people in the community. She

spoke with her manager, who gave her permission to leave the plantation. They worked against the power dynamic to get what they needed.

Finally, several women mentioned engaging in pluriactivity (Brookfield & Parsons, 2007), or multiple forms of income-generating activity, in order to support themselves, their families, and their goals. As mentioned, Miriam cooked food for workers on the flower plantations, as well as making homemade ice cream out of fruit and her own cow's milk. Sandra cleaned the offices of the plantation where she worked after-hours to make extra money. Today, Paola fries plantain and potato chips in a small operation in her backyard, packaging and selling them to local bus stations, schools and other vendors. This food preparation is part of a larger community tourism project in Vicundo in which all of these informants take part. Described in more detail in the introductory chapter, the community of Vicundo has worked to provide offerings to local and international visitors, including lodging with families and local camping, traditional cooking classes and meals, star-gazing and traditional dance shows, as well as two zoos and a deer sanctuary. The informants mentioned future plans to expand these offerings, such as Miriam, who wants to expand her garden and cook more dishes for visitors, as well as Luis, who wants to construct cabins and showers for his campers. This project provides an important source of income that supplements flower plantation wages, as well as the other sources of income represented in the community. It serves as a counternarrative to the few economic opportunities available in the region, as well

as the dependency of local people on the flower plantations. Community tourism in Vicundo is viewed positively by its members, as an opportunity to improve their lives, to exchange with others, both Ecuadorians and foreigners, and to preserve and share important traditions and customs that are in danger of being lost as the world modernizes and devalues tradition (Zimmerer, 2012). This project reaffirms a “sense of place” in a world that is increasingly mobile and subject to social disintegration (McDowell, 1998:3). Nonetheless, while all of these described activities represent creative entrepreneurship, they also speak to the need for people working in the flower industry to supplement their income because the plantations do not pay sufficient wages to support them. They have to do what they can to support themselves, their families and their community.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide space for women and men informants working in the cut-flower industry to share their life stories and experiences of the work. This chapter focuses on the case study of community members in the small community of Vicundo. While the experiences of people in Vicundo cannot and should not be generalized to the broader population of people working in flowers in and around Cayambe, their stories speak to the specific, place-based experience of a certain group of people. Their stories convey the narratives of active, agentive women and men who seek to create better lives for themselves and



the next generation. Rather than passive victims, these women (and men) navigate the industry and their work in it.

However, I would not go so far as to make a sweeping statement that working in flowers *empowers* these women to the extent that the term paints a picture in which they are also not seen as exploited for their labor. They make the best that they can of their situations, given the constraints they face, including health problems, financial issues, and children who need care and nurturing. In the end, this meant that Paola, Johana and Carlos left (or ‘escaped’) the flower industry to pursue other careers in construction and education. Although Miriam did not, she found ways to make extra income through the pluriactivity discussed above. Diana seeks to see the best of her position, treating it as a professional development opportunity to learn new skills. Their approaches are unique and colorful, just as they are as individuals with stories to share.

Specifically, this chapter begins to tease apart some of the gendered experience of work in this industry. First, women in these narratives often describe their bodies as a key part of labor in the flower industry, the physical tasks they complete with their hands, arms, backs. Their bodies also bear the burden of health problems associated with this labor, including problems with their eyesight, carpal tunnel in their wrists and hands, headaches and welts on their skin. Second, they engage in reproductive labor in the birthing and raising of their children, at odds with full-time careers on flower plantations, while men are not as responsible for

child rearing, more mobile and able to travel or emigrate for educational and job opportunities. Third, these women are subject to gendered power dynamics in terms of the roles they can take on in their work and the permissions and favors they can ask for. Only Paola and Diana have been able to gain positions of greater influence as a supervisor and administrative staff in the plantation office, respectively.

In a related vein, while it is important to recognize the limitations that gender imposes on these women as they work in flowers, I wish to break down some of these barriers through this discussion. This chapter uses a feminist lens to connect the global to the intimate (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006) through the life stories of these women as they work in a globally-connected industry and then go home to their personal lives. Instead of separate spaces, they are enmeshed through the women's experiences. These women are part of an embodied commodity chain from Cayambe to the international destinations of exported flowers. These narratives mess with these gendered spaces, adding women back into the picture they have been in all along as active participants.



## CHAPTER 5: Following the Chain: Flower Consumption and Markets

*“[V]iene la generación de mis padres y ellos ya tenían más oportunidad de trabajar en las plantaciones, tener dinero e ir al mercado, entonces, ya traían hortalizas verduras, arroz, otros productos que ya no se cultivaban aquí, entonces comenzamos a consumir otros productos...nos hemos dado cuenta que la salud de ellos ha sido mejor que la nuestra, mi abuelo ya falleció pero a él, nunca le detectaron enfermedades graves, él se alimentó 100% solo con los productos que sembrábamos aquí o los cambios que hacía con los amigos, el muy poco iba al mercado por una cebolla, para ellos nunca casi nunca hubo las bebidas gaseosas”*

- Carlos, on changes in local diets

*“Quality is the cornerstone behind our success. An uncompromising quest for perfection is our driving force...We take great pride and personal responsibility in the fact that every day, our products adorn ceremonies, celebrations, and other important life moments across the world. We are honored to contribute in a small way. And we view it as part of our heritage to ensure...the moments are commemorated with elegance and beauty”*

- Excerpt from Rosaprima company website

At this point, we approach the end of the commodity chain of cut-flowers in Ecuador. Once the flowers are grown and processed at the flower plantations, they are transported to consumers nationally, regionally, or internationally (Ziegler, 2007). As flowers begin to die as soon as they are cut, the rush is on to get these flowers to their destinations as quickly as possible (Ibid). This chapter explores this

final link in the chain and then flips it on its head by going in the reverse direction. First, I explore the movement and purchase of flowers to domestic and international markets. I argue that the Ecuadorian cut-flower industry reinforces the hierarchy of the Global North over the Global South by showing how these flowers are classified and sorted according to quality and presentation, resulting in the ‘best’ flowers destined for the privileged Global North (United States, Europe, Russia, and China), while flowers of inferior quality end up in national for local consumption.

Second, I delve further into the sale and consumption of flowers as physical commodities and as symbols of intangible concepts such as love, beauty, wealthy and femininity. I do this through a small-scale visual discourse analysis of the marketing materials of one cut-flower company, *Rosaprima*, looking at the specific discourse through images and language used by the company to promote and distinguish its flowers from the competition. Here, I argue that while the origins and labor of Ecuadorian flowers are rendered invisible at the final point of sale, they are very much *not* invisible but rather made visible and celebrated by flower companies when they advertise their cut-flowers to the international market. Instead, place is central to the discourse of flower company marketing, as well as the labor of flower workers, who are labeled and presented as “artisans” who take care to provide customers with ‘perfect’ flowers, especially for women consumers.

Finally, I flip the commodity chain on its head by reversing the direction of its flow using feminist commodity chain analysis proposed by Ramamurthy (2004).

I consider flower workers not just as producers of flowers for the Global North but also as consumers themselves. I discuss how the advent of the cut-flower industry in Cayambe has affected local consumption patterns, including its effects on the local production versus purchase of food and its effect on the purchase of additional commodities, such as land, houses, and consumers goods. I end by discussing what implications these dynamics may have for the future sustainability of the cut-flower industry in the region.

#### **TO MARKET: OBSERVATIONS OF FLOWER MARKETS**

Once flowers are grown and processed by flower workers on the plantations described previously, they are packed onto refrigerated trucks and transported to markets for sale to consumers (Knapp, 2017). Some flowers, called *flor nacional*, are destined for domestic points of sale, such as informal flower vendor stalls, the trunk of someone's car and supermarkets like *SuperMaxi* for the general public, or they are sold to consumers such as churches, hotels, and restaurants. I observed flower vendor stalls in a plaza appropriately called *Plaza de Flores* near churches in downtown Cuenca and at the *Iñaquito* market in downtown Quito (Figure 17). These stalls sold beautiful, colorful flowers in bouquets directly to the public at around \$4 for 25 roses. What was most notable about these stalls in that they were all managed by women, young and old. I did not see a single man running a flower stall during my summer of fieldwork. One can interpret this a couple ways: perhaps women

carve out this space for themselves to have businesses or perhaps, flowers are associated more with femininity, and therefore, women, rather than men, sell flowers in gendered spaces. The idea of flowers connected with femininity is explored more in the following section.

In addition, I observed the flower sections of major supermarkets in the urban spaces of Cuenca and Quito (Figure 17). These sections also included bouquets of diverse flowers, with similar pricing, about \$5-6 for one dozen roses. While waiting at a bus station in northern Quito, I also observed a passenger bus pull up and someone hauled off several cardboard boxes full of rose bouquets with the names of Quito hotels marked on the sides (Figure 18). While the flowers at the informal flower stalls did not show labeling of their origins, the flowers sold in supermarkets at least had a sticker indicating the major company selling the flowers. The boxes of flowers on the bus destined for Quito hotels also had labeling of the flower plantations where they were produced.

Other cut-flowers produced travel much farther to reach their final destinations. Many are transported by truck to the Quito airport for transport to international clients, including the United States, Europe, Russia, and China (Knapp, 2017; Ziegler, 2007). The main point of entry for cut-flowers to the United States is Miami, where the flowers are inspected and then trucked or flown to other states in the country (Ibid). In Austin, they may end up at Whole Foods, HEB, Central Market or another major supermarket where they are sold directly to

consumers (Figure 19). Generally, when consumers purchase these flowers, there is no labeling on the bouquets to indicate where the flowers were produced, as they are cleaned and repackaged with materials presenting the name and branding of the supermarket chain.

In addition, I learned that the flowers themselves are different from those sold in Ecuador, the *flor nacional*. Instead, cut-flowers are classified and sorted into a tiered hierarchy system in which the highest quality flowers are sent to importing countries, according to the specific characteristics demanded by each client, such as bud size, color and stem length (Knapp, 2017; Ziegler, 2007). Flowers that are not as high in quality or do not meet these strict standards but are still viable are sold domestically as *flor nacional*. For example, an informant stated that if there was one bad petal on a flower, the flower would not be exported. Flowers that are not considered fit enough to sell anywhere are typically chopped up and recycled as compost at the flower plantation, returning to the soil that is used in the beds to grow the next generation of flowers. This sorting and classifying is done during the last stage at the flower plantation in the post-harvest room, as previously described in Chapter 3. As Carlos explained of a nearby flower company: “[E]llos tienen flor de muy buena calidad, entonces tienen un buen mercado internacional...tienen la venta de flores solamente en forma seleccionada, o mercado internacional y mucha de la flor que me imagino, no es tan buena, entonces esa flor lo que hacen es nuevamente poner en algunos procesos para hacer como posiblemente abonos orgánicos...esa flor,

*no la venden ni siquiera la regalan, entonces no sé si es una estrategia o que para mantener su calidad de flor, porque otras empresas aprovechan vendiendo estas flores no tan buenas como mercado nacional, entonces hay muchos compradores que lo revenden y posiblemente es un sustento también para ellos como a sus familias...es algo curioso/*They have flowers of very good quality, therefore, they have a good international market...they sell flowers only in selected form, or for the international market and a lot of the flower I imagine, is not very good, but that flower, what they do is put it back in the process to make organic compost...that flower, they don't sell it nor do they give it away, so I don't know if that is a strategy or what to maintain the quality of their flower, because other companies take advantage and resell it and possibly it is sustenance for them as well as their families...[this practice] is curious". This quote explains two important ideas. First, it describes what flower plantations typically do, which is to sell flowers that do not meet international standards to the domestic market or to give away flowers locally, referring to the tiered hierarchy system just described. Second, it suggests that some flower companies, like the one described above, are even more selective and protective of their product, preferring





Figure 17. Flowers sold at supermarkets and flower stalls in Ecuador



Figure 18. Flowers in cardboard boxes at a Quito bus station destined for Quito hotels



Figure 19. Flowers sold at supermarkets in Austin (HEB supermarket)

to compost flowers that do not make the cut rather than at least trying to sell them on the domestic market. The idea of quality and what that means in this context will be discussed further in the next section.

The majority of cut-flowers available for purchase in United States supermarkets come from Ecuador or Colombia (Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006), with some flowers now being grown in countries in Africa and Asia also (Korovkin & Sanmiguel-Valderrama, 2007). The cut flowers travel to Miami and Los Angeles in the United States (Knapp, 2017) and to other major cities in North America and Europe. A particularly important season in the industry includes the months and weeks leading up to Valentine's Day, when Northern consumers typically purchase bouquets of flowers for loved-ones. Additional seasonal workers may be added to payroll during such peak seasons in order to keep up with international demand. Ecuador's cut-flower production has been subject to the volatility of the global economy, international trade and the export market (Sawers, 2005), as well as consumer habits and spending in the Global North.

While the bouquets change many hands after the flowers leave the plantations and head to their final destinations, women are most often the last ones to handle the flowers and pack them for transport. Nonetheless, as described in this section, the flowers sold are lucky to bear the name of the company that produced them. The labor that went into producing these flowers, mostly by women described in Chapters 3 and 4, is rendered invisible as the flowers move along the commodity

chain. Their labor is also blurred at the plantations themselves, as high volumes and the mechanistic labor of many flower workers means that not even managers and supervisors know exactly who did what. Only the flower workers themselves know the work that they put into each bouquet of flowers that is sent out the door.

#### **THE ROSE IS A FLOWER OF LOVE: A VISUAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

While the origins and labor to produce the flowers is made invisible at the final point of sale in supermarkets and the like, they are very much *not* invisible but rather touted and celebrated by flower companies when they advertise their cut-flowers to the international market. Instead, place is central to the discourse of flower company marketing, as well as the flower workers, who are labeled and presented as “artisans” who take utmost care to provide customers with the best flowers possible. What is going on here? These dynamics are discussed in this section, which presents a short visual discourse analysis of selected online marketing materials used by a flower company in Ecuador to attract international clients. The analysis was done using the concepts and techniques explained by Gillian Rose in her seminal text *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (2016).<sup>11</sup> Given that pictures can often tell you much more than words, the section shows how the images and accompanying text create a particular type of discourse used by flower companies that show Ecuadorian

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<sup>11</sup> More on this process in Chapter 2 on methodology



flowers as: (1) unique among international flowers due to Ecuador's 'geographic advantage', (2) produced with care and an eye for quality by skillful 'artisan' workers, (3) grown with (environmental) sustainability in mind, and (4) desirable, especially for a female audience to celebrate special occasions and to strive for intangible concepts like love and happiness. The implications of this discourse will be discussed at the conclusion of the section.



Figure 20. Screenshot from *Rosaprima* website, taken July 9, 2017

### ***Ecuador's 'Geographic Advantage'***

A significant selling point for flower companies in Ecuador is their geography. As described in Chapter 1, Ecuador has what can be called a 'geographic advantage' for growing flowers due to its location on the equatorial line. This location means regular sunlight throughout the year. In addition, the majority of flowers are grown



### *Roses with Altitude*

#### *Why Rosadex Roses stand out*

Only in the equator roses grow perfectly straight. Ecuador is a great place to cultivate roses. Its real advantage is that they get natural light all year round, in addition that our roses are located at high altitude (2920 meters above sea level) in the lush volcano valley of Cayambe.

Figure 21. Screenshot from *La Compañía's (Rosadex)* website, taken July 10, 2017

at higher altitudes in the mountains, which provides ideal growing temperatures for growing this product. As a result of this geography, flowers grown in Ecuador tend to produce bigger blooms with more vibrant colors (Knapp, 2017). These are attractive features in flowers on the international market that set Ecuadorian flowers apart from competitors. Therefore, it is no surprise that flower companies feature their geography as a selling point.

In the text from *Rosadex* (one of the plantations I visited in Chapter 3 – Figure 21) and the image from *Rosaprima* (Figure 20), one observes references to this ‘geographic advantage’. The text from *Rosadex* calls their product “roses with altitude”, referring to the higher mountain climate mentioned. They also make the claim that “only in the equator roses grow perfectly straight”, nodding to their ‘unique’ geographic location producing an enviable product that is supposedly “perfect”. Finally, *Rosadex* describes their location as “the lush volcano valley of

Cayambe”, a description that creates a positive image in the consumer’s mind, an area that seems ideal for growing agricultural products – especially flowers. This description is pictured in the *Rosaprima* image, which depicts *Nevado de Cayambe*, a notable mountain landmark in Cayambe that is often covered with snow, towering over the valley. Connecting flowers with this memorable landmark helps to distinguish Ecuadorian flowers *from Cayambe* so that potential clients will remember this place and hopefully be attracted to the visual beauty and positive descriptions to want to purchase these flowers from *here* and nowhere else. As Figure 20 declares, the intent is for these roses to be “legendary”, or at least memorable in the minds of international clients.



### *Sophisticated Beauty*

Our roses are handcrafted by skillful artisans who take great pride in producing roses of world-renowned excellence and beauty. It takes unique skills and craftsmanship, and a willingness to give each rose individual attention to create unspoiled beauty and luxury – traits that define Rosaprima. With a passion for roses and expertise in the growing process, only the hand of an skilled grower can accomplish the superior quality that is expected of a Rosaprima rose.

### *The Hand of the Artisan*

The inexplicable beauty of a Rosaprima rose lies in the smallest of details, from planting rose seeds at the right time of year to rising before the sun to harvest the crops. Creating a luxury rose of unequalled beauty is a meticulous and complex process that requires a combination of manual skills and advanced technology. Our rose experts constantly re-evaluate to guarantee impeccable aesthetics and performance. The payoff for our artisans is creating work they are truly proud of and knowing their roses are selected for those moments in life when only the finest will do.

### *Training and Creativity*

Our rose specialists, individuals with a precise eye for quality and beauty, have been carefully trained for many years in their craft of cultivating beautiful roses. From the growers in the field to the engineers in the lab, our team members excel in their areas of expertise. Our 1200-member team is a vital link in the process of growing a beautiful rose. Rosaprima fosters an environment in which meaningful work brings pride and fulfillment at all levels of the company.

Figure 22. Screenshot from *Rosaprima* website, taken July 9, 2017

### *Care, Quality and Art*

A second characteristic used by flower companies in Ecuador to distinguish their flowers is quality. These companies pride themselves on offering flowers of only the best quality for international clients, as classified and culled in the tiered hierarchy system described earlier in the chapter. Who does this work? This is where the marketing materials acknowledge the flower workers who produce the flowers, growing them and preparing them to be sent to clients around the world. These workers are cast as “skillful artisans” who “take great pride in producing roses of world-renowned excellence and beauty”, a process that “takes unique skills and craftsmanship” as described in Figure 22. This language evokes the idea that producing flowers is an art, an object of beauty that is produced with the utmost care, which is an appealing image to a potential customer. The image in Figure 22 is of a darker-skinned<sup>12</sup> male worker staring intently at a red rose, with a background of roses indicating he is probably in a greenhouse. He looks at the rose as if at a canvas that he is painting, which supports the idea of workers as veritable artists. We cannot see his hands for ‘crafting’, but we do see his eyes, the supposed look of concentration. I find this language and the accompanying photograph interesting because this imagery does not match up with what I observed at the flower plantations, which have much more of a factory feeling than an artist’s workshop.

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<sup>12</sup> Darker-skinned relative to the owners, supervisors and office workers described in Chapter 3



However, the photo shows a pleasant scene with lots of roses, blurred to show only the flowers and not the more utilitarian structures, such as the greenhouse frame and plastic covering.

Again, body parts are described, with the workers cast as “individuals with a precise eye for quality and beauty”, an attribute that is desirable to the flower company in its workers. This idea is reinforced with the focus on the worker’s eyes, rather than his hands, in the photograph. The text also describes the work as “a combination of manual skills and advanced technology”. This phrasing is also interesting because it juxtaposes two different processes, manual and automatic labor. While acknowledging the hand labor of workers, the text points toward the desire to innovate and modernize the process with technological advancements, as discussed in Chapter 3. This text and image suggest that workers take the utmost care in their work processing flowers, using their hands and eyes to produce the flowers of the highest quality for international clients. In context, it is interesting to think about flower workers providing care to flowers, at the sacrifice of care work raising families and children. But, of course, this dynamic does not get presented.

### ***(Environmental) Sustainability***

Another significant theme pushed by the flower company marketing materials is the issue of sustainability. *Rosaprima* wants to make it known that their company is thinking about sustainability and that their process of production is not



Figure 23. Screenshot from *Rosaprima* website, taken July 9, 2017

harmful to the environment. They claim to “work in harmony with nature” and that they “take our responsibilities to society and the environment seriously” in the text of Figure 23. These statements are supposed to reassure the customers that they do not have to worry about the impacts of this type of production and their buying into it with their purchases, despite some negative press about the environmental impacts of the cut-flower industry.<sup>13</sup> The second phrase is important because it shows that the company is recognizing sustainability not only as environmental sustainability but also *social* sustainability. This suggests that the company is thinking about how their business affects their workers and the people in the region who rely on this industry for their livelihood. They also state that they have a “moral

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/14/opinion/14stewart.html> and <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2002/01/deflowering-ecuador>

obligation to help sustain the natural beauty”, placing the burden on the company to prevent environmental damage and maintain the image of beauty that is so important to the company and the industry. Like the coveted rose, the company wants to leave the impression that the landscape maintains its beauty. The image chosen to accompany this text is worth noting. Although talking about the environment, they choose to feature a darker-skinned woman, perhaps of Afro-Ecuadorian descent, who looks to be a worker by her dress, staring off into the distance at something the audience cannot see. Perhaps she is supposed to be staring wistfully, contemplating sustainability and the future.

While the cut-flower industry has been improving in recent years compared to when it started in the 1980's, with more consideration for working conditions and benefits, as well as the environmental footprint, I consider a lot of this discourse part of a greenwashing campaign to make the company and the industry at large seem more positive and less harmful than it is. Several informants mentioned being concerned about the environmental effects of the flower plantations surrounding their community, including observing the river losing its fish population and waste from the plantations floating down it, as well as noting a strange, chemical smell in the air. While these claims have not been studied or substantiated, the point is to take this language about minimizing impact with a grain of salt. At the very least, it is clear that the company plans to be around for the long-term.

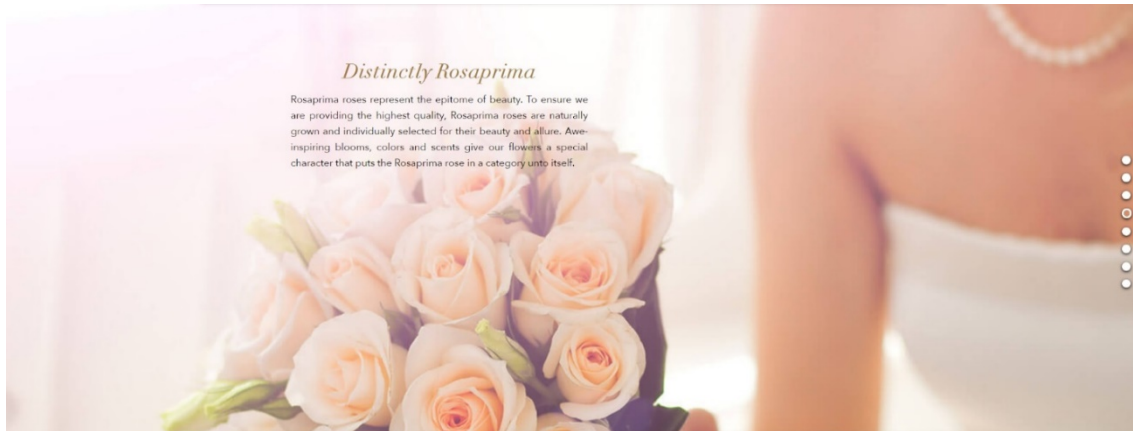


Figure 24. Screenshot from *Rosaprima* website, taken July 9, 2017

### ***Desire (for Women)***

Finally, one cannot help but notice while scrolling through the images on *Rosaprima's* website that there are a lot of women modeled with their flowers, and they are very light-skinned. Figure 24 depicts a typical image on the company website, a feminine figure in a white dress and pearl necklace holding a bouquet of light pink flowers, suggesting a bride on her wedding day. The text says “Rosaprima roses represent the epitome of beauty”, highlighting a sense of perfection, an ideal to be admired and desired. Both the flowers and the woman are highly aesthetically pleasing. Figure 25 shows a second woman, also with light skin, posing with light pink roses. In this image, we see the woman's face, which is attractive. She lounges and stares into the eyes of the audience of the photograph, which is inviting. The color of her lips mirrors the color of the roses, as does her skin tone, light, pale, with a pink hue. This image is hyperfeminine, as is the first one. They represent the idealized female form, lighter-skinned to signify her privilege, someone to be

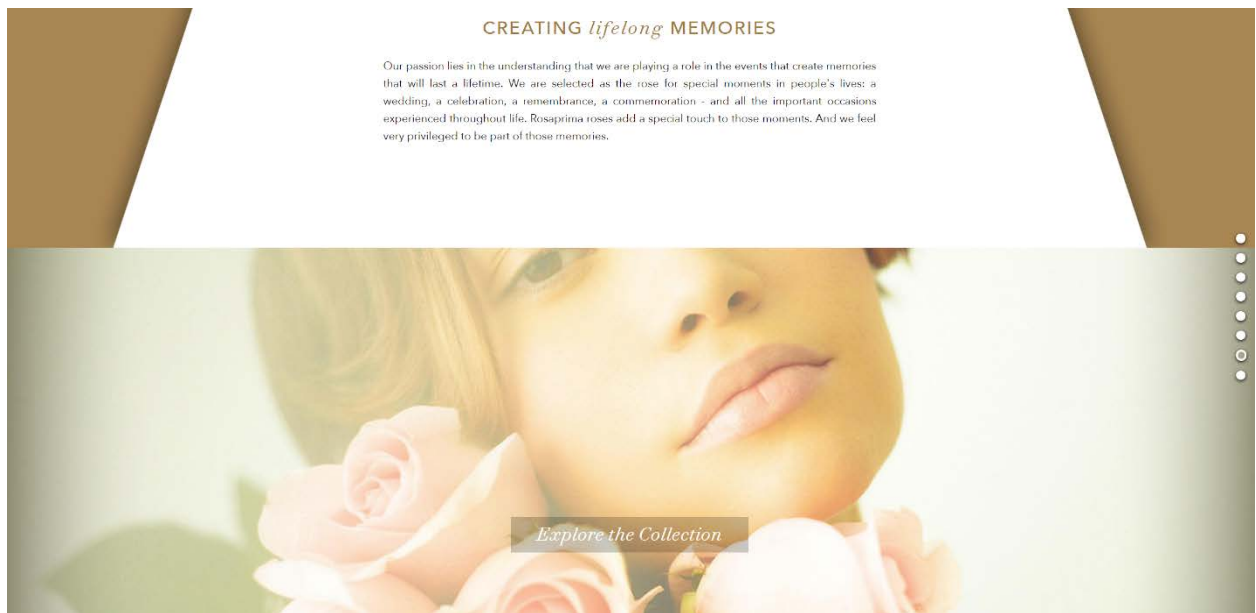


Figure 25. Screenshot from *Rosaprima* website, taken July 9, 2017

coveted, surrounded by flowers that support these ideals. The audience wants her, and they want the flowers too. The text with this image reads: “we are playing a role in the events that create memories that will last a lifetime...Rosaprima roses add a special touch to those moments”. This language draws on the emotions of customers, associating their product with important moments in their lives, including celebrations of rites of passage like weddings. In this way, the product, flowers, comes to symbolize these significant events, becoming part of the memories themselves. Flowers are commodities and simultaneously symbols for ideals, intangible concepts like love, wealth, celebration, that customers strive to attain through their consumption of them.

The purpose of this section has been to explore a part of the dominant discourse of the cut-flower industry in Ecuador through a short visual discourse

analysis of online marketing materials presented by the flower company *Rosaprima*. Through photographs and text, one can see how the company presents itself and tries to lure an international clientele to purchase its flowers by distinguishing itself from competitors. Selling flowers is selling a promise: by consuming these flowers, the customer is consuming something special from a unique, well-protected place, produced with care by artisans who take pride in helping you to create and celebrate your important day (Ziegler, 2007). The customer can feel good about this purchase. Through this language and these photos, the company creates a positive, desirable mental image, far from the industrial realities of the flower plantation, as explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

#### **KEEP IT LOCAL? EFFECTS OF FLOWER PRODUCTION ON LOCAL CONSUMPTION**

So far, this project has followed the traditional commodity chain of cut-flowers from Global South production to Global North consumption. However, as is common in feminist work, there is a need to trouble this process through Ramamurthy's (2004) feminist commodity chain analysis described in Chapter 2. This process calls for following of the commodity chain from multiple directions; instead of viewing flower workers in Ecuador as simply producers of flowers, they are acknowledged to be consumers themselves.

With that troubling in mind, this section explores flower workers as consumers and how the cut-flower industry has affected their consumption

patterns. As discussed in Chapter 4, women in Vicundo explained how their work and wages in the cut-flower industry gave them the financial opportunity to purchase items with less reliance on outside sources, items such as land, building materials for their houses, and education for their children. In this chapter, I discuss larger dynamics at play: how the arrival of the flower industry has affected the local economy of Cayambe, general consumption patterns among workers and, more specifically, food consumption patterns in recent decades.

### **Changes in the Local Economy and Consumption Patterns**

The rising flower export industry has had a significant impact on the local economy of Cayambe over the last decades (Sawers, 2005). As one flower plantation owner described, the region used to be one of the poorest in Ecuador, but it has since transformed into one of the most prosperous and agriculturally productive. Informants working in the flower industry noted big changes to Cayambe as a result of financial resources concentrating in the area to support flower plantations. Diana described the changes in Cayambe she observed as she was growing up as a result of the introduction of flower plantations: *“[E]l sector florícola ha favorecido de hecho a la infraestructura acá de Cayambe, también hay bastante mejora, antes era un cantón, que te puedo decir, más pequeño...Ha crecido, mucho, yo no recuerdo como era cuando era niña, no recuerdo mucho pero sí sé que todo el crecimiento y las mejoras que se han presentado también es gracia a que se reciben más ingresos*

*también, la gente tiene su trabajo, compra más aquí, y va aportando todo/*The flower sector has favored the creation of infrastructure here in Cayambe, also there is a lot of improvement, before it was a, one can say, very small *cantón*...It has grown, a lot, I remember when I was a child, I don't remember a lot but I do remember all the growth and the improvements that the [industry] has presented, thanks to receiving more income also, the people have work, they buy more here, and [the industry] is contributing everything”.

Paola extended these ideas, noting how everything is connected: “[I]gual las florícolas vinieron gente de afuera extranjeros que invirtieron aquí, hicieron su dinero y se fueron, eso era bueno para mucha gente de aquí...mientras más haya trabajo aquí, hay gente que va a consumir en las tiendas y todo eso entonces ahí genera, como se puede decir, es una cadena, una red... al momento de cerrar una empresa, una fábrica, una florícola, hay mucho desempleo y si afecta bastante, eso afecta bastante, a la población, en general/As such, the flower plantations brought outsiders who invested here, they made money and they left, that was good for many people from here...while [there are] more work[ing] here, there are people that go consume in the stores and all of that therefore generates [money], one can say, it's a chain, a network...the moment that a company, a Factory, a flower plantation closes, there is a lot of unemployment and this affects [everything] a lot, that affects [everything] a lot, the population, in general”. More money invested in flower plantations has meant more money invested in the local economy and businesses, which means



more money spent by local consumers. While not common, if a flower plantation should close its doors, this action would have a massive effect on the area, resulting in unemployment and fewer people buying goods and services, affecting the local economy. This precarity is discussed in previous chapters.

Informants Miriam and Diana also discussed how the flower industry has caused the immigration of people from other parts of Ecuador and abroad, leading to increased demand for local housing. Local people have responded by renting out rooms or homes, another source of income to support their families. As they explain: “MIRIAM: *“Vienen gente de afuera y lo que hacen es rápido a buscar un cuarto para arrendar, entonces el arriendo para la gente que ha tenido, póngase una casita extra ya ha tenido un ingreso más/*People come from elsewhere and what they do is quickly look for a room to rent, then people that have [it offer] the rental, they make an extra little house and then they have an [extra source] of income

DIANA: *Las personas que arriendan ya tienen otro ingreso más/*People who rent then have another [source] income

MIRIAM: *entonces han arrendado bastante/*Therefore, many have rented [out their places]

DIANA: *De hecho, por donde viven mis papis, la mayoría de casas arriendan y todas las personas que arriendan son personas de la costa, de todos lados, que trabajan en las florícolas/*In fact, where my parents live, the majority of the houses [are rented

out] and all the people that rent are people from the coast, from everywhere, who work in the flower plantations”

The flower industry is shaping not only the physical and economic landscape for people living in the region, but also their lifestyles and consumption habits. Whereas before the arrival of the flower industry people did not have disposal incomes to purchase extra goods beyond what they needed to get by, now paychecks in flower work provide more funds that allow people to buy new products. Miriam observed these changes in her coworkers: “[H]ay compañeros que trabajan bastante tiempo en la florícola, pero con el dinero salen a bailes, comen bien por ahí se dan sus lujos de ropas caras o se gastan en cosas que no sirven/There are coworkers who work a long time in the flower plantation, but with the money [they earn] they go out to dances, eat well [and buy] luxuries like expensive clothing or they spend [money] on things that don’t serve them”. Miriam is making the point that she sees coworkers buying a lot of things she considers superfluous, not necessary. While this is her judgment, her statement points to the observation that flower workers are buying more, consuming more than before, now that they have bigger paychecks. These paychecks, generally paid twice per month, have also changed the movement of flower workers in the community. As Carlos described: “[L]o único bueno que hace felices piensan los trabajadores es cuando llegan el fin de mes y todos corren al banco a tratar de sacar el dinero y eso yo [veo] cada fin de mes en aquí cerca en Cayambe en los cajeros, mucha gente esperando, haciendo filas para el dinero/The only good thing

that makes the [flower] workers happy is when the end of the month arrives and everyone runs to the bank to try to withdraw the money and I [see] that at the end of every month here in Cayambe at the ATMs, many people waiting, making lines for money”. One can physically see flower workers forming lines to cash their paychecks in order to buy what they need – or want – to buy. They, too, are consumers.

### ***Changes in Food Consumption Patterns***

The effects of the arrival of flower plantations to Cayambe in local food consumption habits are mixed. Skarbø (2014) found that employment on flower plantations strengthens local agriculture and consumption by increasing agrobiodiversity in her study in Cotacachi. However, my research found a different trend. Informants told me that in the past, local people were more self-sufficient and grew their own, traditional foods like *cebada* (barley), *maíz* (corn), and *fréjol* (beans). Over time, as more people entered the flower plantations to work, they started to earn more money. Coupled with economic growth and more businesses and food markets in Cayambe, flower workers shifted to producing less and purchasing more of their food. As Carlos explains: “[V]iene la generación de mis padres y ellos ya tenían más oportunidad de trabajar en las plantaciones, tener dinero e ir al mercado, entonces, ya traían hortalizas verduras, arroz, otros productos que ya no se cultivaban aquí, entonces comenzamos a consumir otros productos...nos hemos

*dado cuenta que la salud de ellos ha sido mejor que la nuestra, mi abuelo ya falleció pero a él, nunca le detectaron enfermedades graves, él se alimentó 100% solo con los productos que sembrábamos aquí o los cambios que hacía con los amigos, el muy poco iba al mercado por una cebolla, para ellos nunca casi nunca hubo las bebidas gaseosas/The generation of my parents comes and they already had more opportunity to work in the plantations, [they] have money and go to the market, they bought vegetables, rice, other products that were not grown here, then we started to consume other products...we have realized that their health has been better than ours, my grandfather has passed away but he has never been diagnosed with serious diseases, he has been 100% nourished only with the products that we planted here or the trading he did with his friends, they very [infrequently] went to the market for an onion, for them there were almost never any soft drinks". As he explains, this shift in food consumption patterns has also resulted in a change in the diets of local people. While they used to eat more whole, home-grown foods, now they eat (and drink) more processed food. He notes that now people drink soft drinks and eat rice, items not consumed by previous generations.*

These findings are supported by the research of Ecuadorian scholar Ing. David Eduardo Ávalos Ahumada, whose recent Masters thesis *Dinámicas de agricultura familiar en torno a la existencia de la producción florícola en la parroquia de Tabacundo, Ecuador* (2017) explored the relationship between work in flower plantations and local agricultural practices in nearby Tabacundo. His thesis found

that flower work, including microenterprises started by former agriculturalists, had a strong negative impact on local agricultural practices: *“El impacto de la floricultura en la agricultura campesina es alto, al mutar las ocupaciones de los comuneros, en tanto que los pequeños productores se encadenan débilmente al mercado, pero usando sus exigencias técnicas que obligan a hacer menos agraria u orgánica su producción/The impact of floriculture on peasant agriculture is high, by changing the occupations of the comuneros, while small producers are weakly linked to the market, but using their technical demands that make their production less agrarian or organic”* (62). Here, he refers to the demands of the global market to leave self-sufficient but unpaid agricultural labor behind in order to make a wage in flower labor to pay for basic necessities. He notes that rent is now a large expense that people must pay, referring back to the increase in rented home discussed by Miriam and Diana. Ávalos Ahumada also explains that there is an anti-agricultural urban bias which results in a weak local market for grown food, coupled with a lack of access to urban markets to sell these goods, further disincentive for agricultural production in the region. He goes on to say: *“Esta pérdida de importancia de la actividad agrícola se expresa en un alto nivel de ocupación no agrícola de los miembros de la unidad productiva familia, un mayor porcentaje de trabajadores en plantaciones florícolas, así como un alto nivel de incidencia de la actividad florícola en la zona/This loss of importance of agricultural activity is expressed in a high level of non-agricultural occupation of the members of the family productive unit, a greater*

percentage of workers in flower plantations, as well as a high level of incidence of floricultural activity in the area” (126). Instead of producing food, more people are taking up floriculture or working in flower plantations in order to make a living wage to survive. This dynamic, which he terms the “*modelo especulativo de capitalización florícola*/speculative model of floral capitalization” deepens with time as people have to answer to the global market, even with global crises that increase precarity (2017:130). Overall, he calls for a strengthening of local, rather than global, markets in order to improve peoples’ situations in the region.

Nonetheless, despite these findings, many people in the Cayambe region are still pursuing agriculture or home gardens to feed themselves. Three of my flower worker informants, Miriam, Sandra and Paola, all had personal farms or gardens with crops and animals to supply their families with food. Miriam described leaving her flower plantation at the end of the workday and coming home in the evening to tend her animals and crops when “*me doy modos hacer*/when I have the energy”. She has many crops growing, as well as a cow, goat, chickens, and guinea pigs. Miriam explained that these agricultural products serve as an investment in her future, preventing hunger: “*Cuando no tengo dinero, tengo animales*/When I don’t have money [to buy food or anything else], I have animals [to eat and to sell”. When I visited her, she spent most of her time in the garden watering and tending to her plants, harvesting something and bringing it to the kitchen to prepare a meal for her family. She invited me over for lunch once, and she proudly explained that the

majority of the ingredients for the meal came from her garden, not from the store in Cayambe. Sandra and Paola mirrored these sentiments when they showed their gardens. While many people noted in Ávalos Ahumada's study are leaving agriculture behind in favor of flowers, some, such as the women of Vicundo, are still practicing subsistence agriculture in order to feed their families, to stretch their dollar, and to literally grow insurance against hunger in the future.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter seeks to follow the commodity chain of cut-flowers in Ecuador to its logical conclusion at the point of sale and consumption, then upend traditional commodity chain logic and use a feminist commodity chain approach to reverse and return to the site and actors of production, acknowledging these producers as consumers who also consume simultaneously. First, it explored the purchase of cut-flowers in the market, both at the national level in Ecuador and at the international level in consumer countries and regions like the United States, Europe, China and Russia. We saw how cut-flowers are classified and divided into a tiered hierarchy of quality, with the highest quality flowers going to international clients, inferior quality flowers consumed domestically in Ecuador, and the poorest quality flowers wasted or composted and reused to produce more flowers. This hierarchy mirrors that which flower workers experience as they work on flower plantations. Just as flowers are sorted and classified, so too are the women working on the plantations.

In most cases, we see that the origin and labor behind the flowers is rendered invisible at the point of sale in stalls, markets and stores, unknown to the customer bringing home that beautiful bouquet.

However, the next section explored how these aspects of the flower industry in Ecuador are very much made visible when marketed to international customers online. In this way, flower workers negotiate invisibilization of their labor in one realm, coupled with high visibility as “flower artisans” for the purposes of promoting the flower company in the international market. This dynamic shows another moment of exploitation. This section delved into the drivers of international consumption of Ecuadorian flowers through a short visual discourse analysis of the flower company marketing materials. We see how domestic and international consumers are drawn into the world of Ecuadorian flowers, promised geographically unique, artisanal, environmentally sustainable, desirable, feminine flowers.

Finally, we turn back to flower workers, recognizing them not only as producers, but also as consumers themselves. The section explores the changes the cut-flower industry has brought to the region, including changes in the consumption of commodities, rented spaces, and food. We see that while work in the flower industry provides financial opportunities to purchase goods and services previously unattainable, it simultaneously makes people more dependent on this work, as they shift away from subsistence agriculture and use their paychecks to buy foods from the local markets. This dynamic brings the question of sustainability to



mind. *Rosaprima* touts their company as sustainability-conscious in its marketing literature, yet one has to wonder about the future of this industry, especially from a social perspective. This question will be pondered further in the following, concluding chapter of this thesis.



## CHAPTER 6: Blooming On: Coming to Conclusions

*“Las ciudades cercanas a las plantaciones ellos están muy contentos con estos negocios porque realmente ha generado movimiento de otros negocios dentro de la ciudad, posiblemente se sienten beneficiados por el crecimiento de las plantaciones, la gente, más gente más movimiento en todo ámbito, pero yo también considero de que no hay una conciencia cada uno quiere vivir, tener su dinero y no analizan que de pronto va a pasar en el futuro en más probable que estas tierras utilizadas para las plantaciones después de unos 10 años o 15 años ya no sean aptas para producir, alimentos buenos producirán alimentos pero contaminados”*

- Carlos, on the future of the flower industry in Cayambe

The purpose of this chapter is to review the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and to connect them to the arguments and findings of the previous empirical chapters (Chapter 3-5), as well as coming to ultimate conclusions that resulted from the study. In addition, this chapter will revisit the feminist geographic theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2 to begin to tie theory to practice and see where that process can lead the study. After reviewing the findings of each chapter, the chapter discusses the main takeaways of the study for different audiences: Global North consumers, Latin Americanist scholars, as well as Feminist

Geographers. I end by posing questions for future research on the experience of the cut-flower industry in Ecuador, conjecturing where it might lead.

#### **TAKE TIME TO SMELL THE ROSES: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

I return now to the framing research questions of this thesis project:

- (1) What are the (gendered, raced, classed, and aged) experiences of women working in the floriculture industry in Cayambe, Ecuador?*
- (2) How do female workers navigate and negotiate this work?*
- (3) How does work in floriculture affect and shape these workers' daily lives?*

Given this framework, the following discussion will address each of these questions in turn and the main findings and arguments that begin to answer each of them.

- (1) What are the (gendered, raced, classed, and aged) experiences of women working in the floriculture industry in Cayambe, Ecuador?*

Chapter 3 found that women working in floriculture in Cayambe have varied experiences working in the floriculture industry, ranging from the very positive to the very negative. They experience the same space of flower plantations differently depending on their positionality of gender, race, class and age and divisions of labor, which is dependent on these social dimensions, and they receive treatment by management accordingly. I argued that flower plantations very much follow a gendered, raced, classed, and aged power hierarchy and that those with more privilege tend to have more positive experiences than those with less. In addition,

while there have been some opportunities for women to advance to positions with more influence, they still face challenges such as wage inequality, harassment, and limited opportunities for advancement compared to men.

These power dynamics continue in the colonial tradition of *haciendas*, combined with more modern dynamics of global export and industrial labor. In many cases, flower plantations have actually converted from previous *haciendas*; while the land use has transitioned, hierarchical labor structures and practices carry on much of this colonial legacy. Additionally, workers face the threat of losing their jobs due to innovation and mechanization of the industry as it ‘races to the bottom’, cutting labor costs as much as possible in a competitive, labor-intensive industry.

Chapter 4 explored some aspects of the gendered experience of work in this industry. First, women in these narratives often describe their bodies as a key part of labor in the flower industry, the physical tasks they complete with their hands, arms, and backs. Their bodies also bear the burden of health problems associated with this labor. This discourse mirrored discussion in Chapter 3 about the importance of body parts in the international export industry. Second, they engage in reproductive labor in the birthing and raising of their children, at odds with full-time careers on flower plantations engaging in economic labor, while men are not as responsible, more able to travel or emigrate to pursue opportunities. Third, these women are subject to gendered power dynamics in terms of the more limited roles they can take on in their work and the permissions and favors they can ask for.

Chapter 5 explored the movement of flowers to domestic and international markets, arguing that the Ecuadorian cut-flower industry reinforces the hierarchy of the Global North over the Global South by showing how these flowers are classified and sorted according to quality and presentation, resulting in the ‘best’ flowers destined for the privileged Global North, while flowers of inferior quality end up in national markets for local consumption. This hierarchy mirrors Radcliffe’s (2015) ‘hierarchy of difference’ that flower workers experience on flower plantations which remains very much alive today, from the local level of flower plantations to the global level of export commodity markets. Just as flowers are sorted and classified, so too are the women working on the plantations.

*(2) How do female workers navigate and negotiate this work?*

Through the telling of women’s stories, Chapter 4 also showed the varied experiences of women (and men) in the community of Vicundo who have participated in flower work, depicting them as active agents leading rich lives full of creative activity, rather than passive laborers or victims. The chapter argued that they navigate this work according to the conditions they face, from the leadership opportunities of work in administration to the manual labor of direct work with flowers. I found that women (and men) in Vicundo have been able to carve out lives for themselves from flower plantation work, in many cases as leaders of their own households. Work in cut-flowers offers employment, skills-building and a source of

income that is positive for many women workers. However, I would not go so far as to make a sweeping statement that working in flowers *empowers* these women. They make the best that they can of their situations, given the constraints they face, including health problems, financial issues, and children who need care and nurturing. Today, they seek alternative sources of income through entrepreneurial activities and the promotion of community tourism and practice of tradition, a counternarrative to flower plantation work.

Chapter 5 argued that while the origins and labor of Ecuadorian flowers are rendered invisible at the final point of sale, they are very much *not* invisibilized but rather celebrated by flower companies when they advertise their cut-flowers to the international market. Instead, place is central to the discourse of flower company marketing, as well as flower workers, who are labeled and presented as “artisans” who take care to provide customers with ‘perfect’ flowers, especially for women. This was shown through small-scale visual discourse analysis of the marketing materials of a cut-flower company, looking at the specific discourse through images and language used by the company to promote and distinguish its flowers from the competition. In this way, flower workers negotiate an invisibilized perception that does not acknowledge their labor in one sense, while simultaneously being highly visible and painted as “flower artisans” for the exploitive purposes of promoting the flower company in the international market.

*(3) How does work in floriculture affect and shape these workers' daily lives?*

Chapter 4 found that work in cut-flowers provides flower workers with new financial opportunities to save for land, livestock and house-building materials. In addition, many were able to pay for their children's educations with flower incomes. I argue that flower work has physically shaped the landscape in the community of Vicundo and beyond through the physical construction of houses and businesses. In addition, flower work has shaped the finances and opportunities of flower workers and their children in the long-term as they pursue properties, farms, and education. The sacrifices of flower work described in this chapter greatly affected their lives, causing them to have to navigate the industry to make the best situation for their lives and those of their families. Additionally, Chapter 4 found that despite their counternarrative of community tourism, members of Vicundo cannot completely escape flower plantations, as their community is physically surrounded by plantations that continue to affect their families and daily lives through issues like alleged air and water contamination and encroachment on their land.

Chapter 5 employed Ramamurthy's (2004) feminist commodity chain approach to reverse the direction of the flower commodity chain and return to the site and actors of production, acknowledging flower workers not just as producers of flowers for the Global North but also, simultaneously, as consumers. I argued that the advent of the lucrative cut-flower industry in Cayambe has affected local and

flower worker consumption patterns, including its effects on the local production versus purchase of food and its effect on the purchase of additional commodities, such as land, houses, and consumers goods. We saw that while work in the flower industry provides financial opportunities to purchase goods and services previously unattainable, it simultaneously makes people more dependent on this work, as they shift away from subsistence agriculture and use their paychecks to buy foods from local markets.

The process of consumption is mediated not only by new and bigger paychecks available to flower workers but also by the desire to consume and the promises of a 'better life' that come with it (Bell & Valentine, 1997). A window into this process was shown in the visual discourse analysis of Chapter 5, in which we saw how domestic and international consumers are drawn into the world of Ecuadorian flowers, promised geographically unique, artisanal, environmentally sustainable, desirable, feminine flowers. The analysis reveals the simultaneous consumption of flowers as physical commodities, as well as symbols that promise intangible concepts such as love, beauty, and wealth, which is desired by all.

#### **RING AROUND THE ROSY: CONNECTING THEORY TO EXPERIENCE**

This section brings together the theoretical strands of literature (gender, development and agriculture; feminist political economy of labor; and feminist political ecology) discussed in Chapter 2 and connects them to the results of the



empirical chapters (3-5) to see how they can extend these findings. First, the flower plantation provides an intriguing site to explore each of these strands of literature, as, one can argue, it represents their intersection. Flower plantations represent modern, industrial sites (usually associated with the urban spaces of feminist political economy of labor), which are located in and affect rural spaces (the general focus on feminist political ecology) and focus on female-dominated labor that produces an agricultural product, the cut-flower. In addition, employing a feminist approach to looking at this intersection here means that traditional terms and binaries like agriculture, development, and the rural versus urban can be ‘messed with’ and upended to look at them in new and interesting ways.

As discussed in feminist literature on gender, agriculture and development, women in Ecuador have, in many ways, been ignored from political and development agendas. The flower industry, with its focus on women as ‘suitable’ workers, brings women into the spotlight, connecting them with new employment in export agriculture, supporting subsistence agriculture and agrobiodiversity for some (Skarbø, 2014), while for others, disconnecting them from such agriculture that many of them practiced in the Andes. Echoing this strand of literature, discourse in agriculture and development has touted the industry as ‘empowering’ women through their employment but also producing more labor and less authority. Women who work in the industry carry out waged, economic labor as well as unwaged, reproductive labor as caretakers at home, which is not recognized or

valued by the formal economy. This phenomenon is an example of the invisibilization of women's total labor discussed in feminist political economy literature. As discussed, women also do not have much of a say in their working conditions, nor opportunities for advancement, resulting in the reinforcement of patriarchal power structures.

While feminist political economy seems to traditionally focused on urban, industrial settings, here, the theory is connected to an industrial, factory-like space in predominantly *rural* spaces around Cayambe. Women working on flower plantations participate in industrial labor, while living in rural, urbanizing spaces around these plantations, leading to reimaginings of what it means to be a rural space. Rural spaces have traditionally been associated with isolation and agriculture, with little to no commerce or connection to the outside world. However, in this case we see these sites not only connected to urban spaces such as the busy markets of Quito, but also connected to the world through the transportation and export of flowers to all parts of the globe. This dynamic brings in Bebbington (2001) and Rodriguez Castro, Pini, and Baker's (2016) ideas about the "globalized Andes" and the "globalized countryside", respectively, which point out that rural communities in the Andes are increasingly connected to the global network through the export commodity chain of cut-flowers in a process that is highly active and interactive.

Finally, feminist political ecology is a useful strand of literature for this study because it brings in the relationship of people to their environment and analyzes the

power dynamics and social constructions of gender, race, class and age. Here, we can bring in the local environment and landscape as important parts of the geography of the cut-flower industry, both the environment of the flower plantation and the area in and around Cayambe where these plantations are situated. This thesis explored the space of the flower plantation and how the experience of working in one is mediated by gendered power dynamics in Chapter 3, referring to the questions that feminist political ecologists ask. In addition, Chapters 4 and 5 discussed the effects of the industry on the local landscape, from fears of Vicundo residents who witness the negative environmental effects of being surrounded by plantations, to the larger dynamics of transforming the economy and physical landscape of Cayambe through new infrastructure and a 'sea of plastic' greenhouses dominating the area (César Estacio Jurado, personal communication, July 21, 2017).

These strands, when put into conversation, mess with scale and the urban/rural binary, indicating that it is more productive to think about how we are all connected through labor, production, markets and consumption. Power dynamics, gender, class, race, and more are important to take into consideration when attempting to understand how the industry affects local livelihoods. Cut-flower workers are interacting with the land to produce an agricultural product, but the work is increasingly hybridized with routine, mechanistic tasks indoors, representing a cross between the industrial work studied by feminist political economists and the rural agricultural activities analyzed by feminist political

ecologists. As discussed, Mountz and Hyndman point out that “the local is often essentialized, the domestic feminized, the discourses of globalization hypermasculinized” (2006:447). Like these authors, this thesis seeks to disrupt these discourses, enmeshing the global with the intimate through the life stories of female flower workers as they work in a globalized industry and then go home to their personal lives, interconnecting spaces. Exploring the intersection of the above strands of literature allows me to more critically analyze labor in and the effect on livelihoods of the cut-flower industry in Ecuador in a way that is skeptical of economic ‘empowerment’ discourse yet encourages a look at women’s navigation and strategic participation as cut-flower workers. These women produce and consume alike, part of an embodied commodity chain from Cayambe to international destinations, as Ramamurthy (2004) argues in her analysis.

#### **THE THORN REMAINS: MAIN TAKEAWAYS**

Revisiting the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 1, the data and findings discussed in the previous chapters support the third, alternative hypothesis: Work in flower plantations is nuanced, both positive and negative for women, representing both opportunity and exploitation. Women’s experiences vary greatly to reflect this nuance, depending on the previously mentioned characteristics. They must navigate work in the industry in order to make the best they can of their situation and daily lives outside the plantations. The findings suggest that neither

the first nor the second hypothesis, that women are empowered and that women are exploited through work in the cut-flower industry are sufficient to tell the whole story of their experiences. Past literature on the industry reviewed in Chapter 2 alluded to the nuances of this work, that there are both benefits and challenges associated with it. While these authors have taken more polar stances on this issue, I maintain that for my case study and the informants I spoke with, women's experiences include *both* empowerment and exploitation, to varying degrees. I find it more instructive to view them as constantly navigating and negotiating their work in flowers, trying to make the best of their situation. In this way, I seek to illustrate the agency and active participation of these women in shaping their work experiences and their lives.

This study extends past literature by considering the unique experiences of flower workers and how these experiences are shaped by space and place, power dynamics informed by gender, race, class, and age, and overarching dynamics like neoliberal policy, economic change, and global market volatility. It finds economic 'empowerment' discourse limiting and problematic in how it characterizes peoples', especially women's, situations, especially because neoliberal ideology tends to focus on economic, formal labor, without acknowledging the informal, reproductive labor that many women carry out every day. What I take away from these ideas is an imperative to critique and reframe the situation from globalization *happening to*

people living in rural Andean Ecuador to these actors as agents *acting upon and with* globalization.

With that in mind, the four main points to take away from this study's findings about the cut-flower industry in Ecuador are the following:

1. The experiences of women working in the flower industry in Ecuador are varied and nuanced and cannot be generalized into one overarching statement. These experiences are raced, gendered, classed, and aged, very much shaped by hierarchies of power that echo the structures of colonial *haciendas*.
2. One should not make the blanket statement that women working in flowers are 'empowered' through their work in the industry. Instead, they must actively navigate and negotiate it, making sacrifices, in order to create the best situation for themselves and their families.
3. Flower workers are both producers *and* consumers, and the cut-flower industry is strongly affecting their lives and consumption in the region, with few alternatives.
4. While advertising does acknowledge the labor of 'artisan' flower workers, more of an effort should be made to *recognize on an international level* who they are, what they do to produce flowers, and what effects that labor has on their lives and the region.

Latin Americanists, Feminist Geographers and consumers of flowers in the Global North can all take something away from this study. First, Latin Americanists and Feminist Geographers reading this thesis can see an application of Ramamurthy's (2004) feminist commodity chain analysis, a method that may be relevant to furthering their own work, especially if they focus on commodities, production and/or consumption themes. This approach helps to deepen traditional analysis of commodity chains, to view it in more than one-direction and to recognize production and consumption at each link in the chain. In addition, Latin Americanists can take the major themes and takeaways from an analysis of the cut-flower industry and apply it to other industries or the same industry in other countries within the region, for example, the cut-flower industry in Colombia, another major producer of cut-flowers for export. The flower industry also connects to broader themes of export-agriculture, labor, migration, rural development, and gender dynamics, providing a context for studying these themes from a different avenue.

I encourage Feminist Geographers to look for other examples where the intersection between feminist political economy and feminist political ecology can further their work, where they too can push the binary of rural and urban spaces, between agricultural and industrial work. As feminist scholars are well-known for looking at these cross-sections and troubling these supposed boundaries, I think this is a productive place to explore. What do we make of these growing spaces

where people are working in industrial, export agriculture in rural areas that are rapidly growing and vastly connected with urban markets? What are other examples of these dynamics at play that Feminist Geographers and other scholars could study and look with a critical eye? Finally, consumers of flowers in the Global North will be discussed in the following section.

#### FUTURE OF THE ECUADORIAN FLORICULTURE INDUSTRY

What will become of Ecuador's flower industry in the future? Before coming to my own conclusions, I wanted to get the perspective of informants as to their views of where the flower industry is heading. One informant, Carlos, was the most vocal about his vision: *"Pienso que las plantaciones florícolas que hacen un buen mercado...se mantendrán durante los 10 años, caso contrario...será al final un fracaso donde los dueños terminen viajando al exterior y se queden responsables otras personas, mientras hacen todo el proceso legal, pase el tiempo muchos ya dejen ahí porque se desaniman...entonces pienso que los dueños si sacaron provecho personal de esas tierras, de esos trabajos, como es el objetivo de ellos no, y lo mismo, los trabajadores, como es el objetivo trabajar pero sobre todo eso, nadie esta con el objetivo de cuidar el medio ambiente, ninguna de las dos partes...eso es preocupante....Desde mi punto de vista se podrían enfocar este lugar, a un sector productivo de unas formas de agricultura del pasado como lo era antes de las plantaciones, estos lugares eran granjas ganaderas dedicadas a la producción de leche*



*y otros productos orgánicos*/I think that the floriculture plantations that make a good market ... will remain for 10 years, otherwise ... they will ultimately be failures where the owners end up traveling abroad and other people remain responsible, while doing the whole legal process, many leave because they get discouraged...I think the owners took personal advantage of the lands, of the jobs, as is their objective, and the same, the workers, as the goal is to work above all, nobody [thinks] to take care of the environment, neither of the two parties...that is worrying...From my point of view this place could be focused on a productive sector of some forms of agriculture of the past as it was before the plantations, these places were livestock farms dedicated to the production of milk and other organic products”. This quote, as well as his quote at the beginning of the chapter, allude to the nuanced benefits and drawbacks of the industry and for whom. While the flower industry certainly does provide a large source of employment for the region, one that many people rely on, these benefits are much less than those of flower plantation owners. In turn, the flower plantations affect the land and the local environment over time, resulting in negative consequences for people who call the area home. As he says: “*después de unos 10 años o 15 años [las tierras] ya no sean aptas para producir, alimentos buenos producirán alimentos pero contaminados*”/after some 10 to 15 years, the lands will no longer be apt to produce, they will produce good food but contaminated [food]”. He sees two future scenarios for flower plantations, either continuing on if they face a good market or failing,

especially if the owners lose the motivation to continue the business. The owners will extract what they can from the business and the land, while the people will benefit as they can from the work, but at the end of the day, no one is thinking about the overall effect on the environment, what will be left of Cayambe in future decades.

These comments suggest that people are thinking in the short-term rather than in the long-term. For now, the flower industry works in the sense of profit and employment. But what will happen when it does not work? After several decades of development in the region, the flower industry has been literally built into the landscape. Houses, businesses and infrastructure have been created with the profits from flower work. People are dependent on the work to get by and to support their families. Is there an alternative to flower production in Cayambe? The answer is unclear. When I asked Carlos for his thoughts, he said that the region would benefit from returning to more agriculture for food production, as was more customary in the past. Would it be possible to return to modes of production of the past, or would Cayambe need to adapt, yet again, to a new, modernizing way of life?

In terms of flower consumers, although the majority of Global North flower consumers still do not know the predominantly Andean origins of their purchases, there is increasing awareness of the sourcing and production process of cut flowers, particularly from journalistic coverage and “exposés” of the industry in publications

like the *New York Times*<sup>14</sup> and *Mother Jones*<sup>15</sup>. Such literature has generally taken a critical, negative view of the cut-flower industry, calling on American consumers to reconsider their flower purchases for Valentine's Day and more, demanding chemical-free flowers and better working conditions in consideration of the health and well-being of cut flower workers. In addition, Lyall (2013) argues that while fair-trade standards are important in this industry, the fair-trade system in Ecuador's flower industry today can actually do more harm than good to flower workers by maintaining power structures and placing added burdens on these workers.

Nonetheless, while this thesis has taken a more critical, feminist approach to studying the cut-flower industry, it is important to step back and see the industry from a bigger picture. As presented in Chapter 1 and in Knapp's (2017) overview article, the cut-flower industry represents both challenges *and* opportunities to its participants. Indeed, many informants describe enjoying their work in flowers and that the work benefited them professionally and their families financially. Knapp has discussed how his informants have requested that consumers not boycott the industry due to what they read about labor conditions, because work in the industry represents jobs they rely upon for their livelihoods (personal communication).

Instead, I argue that increased awareness and knowledge as global consumers can lead to informed action to pressure for reform of the industry. While

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/14/opinion/14stewart.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2002/01/deflowering-ecuador>

associations like EXPOFLORES<sup>16</sup> are doing a good job collaborating with the government to change labor laws and working conditions, more should be done. If these associations and the Ecuadorian government hear demands from international consumers, they have more incentive to listen and to change labor policy and practice. For example, consumers could demand better enforcement of labor laws that guarantee payment for overtime hours worked. This could happen if flowers were better labeled with their point of origin and more literature existed that highlighted the realities and experiences of work in the industry, what it takes to produce the flowers that we buy in stalls and markets. The small but growing sub-industry of organic and/or fair-trade cut flowers may also provide an alternative for consumers concerned about health and safety issues that could have an effect on future production trends as producers respond to consumer demands (Knapp, 2017).

#### **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

As always, there is more research to be done to better understand the cut-flower industry in Ecuador, along with the local to global effects through its commodity chain. This Master's thesis joins many recent and excellent studies being conducted by scholars in Ecuador and elsewhere (Ávalos Ahumada, 2017; Alvarado Velázquez, 2016; Banos Acurio, 2017; Guerra Bustillos, 2012; Lyall, 2009; Tuttillo,

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<sup>16</sup> During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to visit the main office of EXPOFLORES and to interview staff. EXPOFLORES is an association in Ecuador devoted to promoting the cut-flower industry.

2010), taking new angles and employing new methodologies to study the industry. Certainly, it has been productive to take a more feminist, embodied approach by interviewing people on the ground in a more in-depth way. I argue that more in-depth interviews with participants in different roles on flower plantations would help to inform future studies. It would be interesting to do some more in-depth and direct research looking at specific social categorizations and dynamics within this type of work. For example, how do workers see race or age affecting their experience in cut-flower work?

In addition, I spoke with flower workers who are from the Cayambe area. Because in-migration is a significant dynamic, it would be interesting to research: What is the experience of flower workers who migrate from other parts of Ecuador or from other countries? What is the effect on social interaction when many cultures come together to live and work in one area? Finally, it would be interesting to look more at the consumption side of the commodity chain to better understand how the flower industry – and flower money – is changing the local landscape. What are flower workers buying with flower money, and how are these consumption decisions affected by whether they are from Cayambe or immigrants? To what extent is the growing economy of Cayambe dependent on the flower industry, what does the industry enable or disable, and what does this mean for the future of Cayambe? I encourage future scholars, in Ecuador and beyond, to take up these and other research questions to further explore the cut-flower industry in Ecuador.

# Appendix



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 · Mail Code A3200  
(512) 471-8871 · FAX (512) 471-8873

FWA # 00002030

Date: 05/12/17

PI: Sophie Fuchs

Dept: Geography and the Environment

Title: The Dynamics of Cut-Flower Agriculture in Andean Ecuador  
and Its Effects on Rural Livelihoods

Re: IRB Expedited Approval for Protocol Number 2017-04-0062

Dear Sophie Fuchs:

In accordance with the Federal Regulations the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the above referenced research study and found it met the requirements for approval under the Expedited category noted below for the following period of time: 05/12/2017 to 05/11/2018. *Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date.* If the research will be conducted at more than one site, you may initiate research at any site from which you have a letter granting you permission to conduct the research. You should retain a copy of the letter in your files.

Expedited category of approval:

- ☐ 1) Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met. (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review). (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.
- ☐ 2) Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows: (a) from healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or (b) from other adults and children<sup>2</sup>, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
- ☐ 3) Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means. Examples:
  - (a) Hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner.
  - (b) Deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction;
  - (c) Permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction.

- (d) Excreta and external secretions (including sweat).
  - (e) Uncannulated saliva collected either in an un-stimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue.
  - (f) Placenta removed at delivery.
  - (g) Amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor.
  - (h) Supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques.
  - (i) Mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings.
  - (j) Sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.
- ☐ 4) Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications).  
Examples:
- (a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy.
  - (b) Weighing or testing sensory acuity.
  - (c) Magnetic resonance imaging.
  - (d) Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography.
  - (e) Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
- ☐ 5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).  
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.
- ☒ 6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- ☒ 7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.  
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.
- ☒ Use the attached approved informed consent document(s).
- ☒ You have been granted a Waiver of Documentation of Consent according to 45 CFR 46.117 and/or 21 CFR 56.109(c)(1).
- ☐ You have been granted a Waiver of Informed Consent according to 45 CFR 46.116(d).

**Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:**

1. Report immediately to the IRB any unanticipated problems.
2. Submit for review and approval by the IRB all modifications to the protocol or consent form(s). Ensure the proposed changes in the approved research are not applied without prior IRB review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. Changes in approved research implemented without IRB review and approval initiated to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject must be promptly reported to the IRB, and will be reviewed under the unanticipated problems policy to determine whether the change was consistent with ensuring the subjects continued welfare.
3. Report any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of subjects to continue to participate.
4. Ensure that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.
5. Use only a currently approved consent form, if applicable.  
Note: Approval periods are for 12 months or less.
6. Protect the confidentiality of all persons and personally identifiable data, and train your staff and collaborators on policies and procedures for ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of subjects and their information.
7. Submit a Continuing Review Application for continuing review by the IRB. Federal regulations require IRB review of on-going projects no less than once a year a reminder letter will be sent to you two months before your expiration date. If a reminder is not received from Office of Research Support (ORS) about your upcoming continuing review, it is still the primary responsibility of the Principal Investigator not to conduct research activities on or after the expiration date. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted, reviewed and approved, before the expiration date.
8. Upon completion of the research study, a Closure Report must be submitted to the ORS.
9. Include the IRB study number on all future correspondence relating to this protocol.

If you have any questions contact the ORS by phone at (512) 471-8871 or via e-mail at [orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

Sincerely,



James Wilson, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair



## Glossary

The terms *cut-flower industry*, *flower industry* and *floriculture* are used interchangeably in this thesis. Both terms refer to the production of flowers such as roses and baby's breath for majority export to consumers in the Global North like the United States, Europe and Russia and some consumption in Ecuador.

A *flower plantation* refers to an agricultural farm where flowers are produced, processed and prepared for transport to markets for national and international consumption. Chapter 2 will discuss the nature of these plantations and the process of production in more detail.

The *Global North* includes those countries with high human development and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, most of which are found in the Northern Hemisphere. This thesis focuses on the United States, Europe, and Russia as part of the Global North. The *Global South* includes those countries with medium and low human development and GDP per capita, most of which are located in the Southern Hemisphere. Ecuador is considered part of the Global South in this thesis.

A *commodity* refers to a product of economic value that is collected, extracted and/or produced, sold and consumed. In this case, the commodity of focus is the flower. *Commodity chain analysis* refers to a tracing of the steps in the process from production to consumption to waste, as well as the actors involved in each of the

steps of this process, while *feminist commodity chain analysis* disrupts and complicates this traditional, one-way approach by looking at producers as also consumers and vice versa (Ramamurthy, 2004).

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